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Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

MARCH 1940

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FLASH The Blind Spot

by Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint

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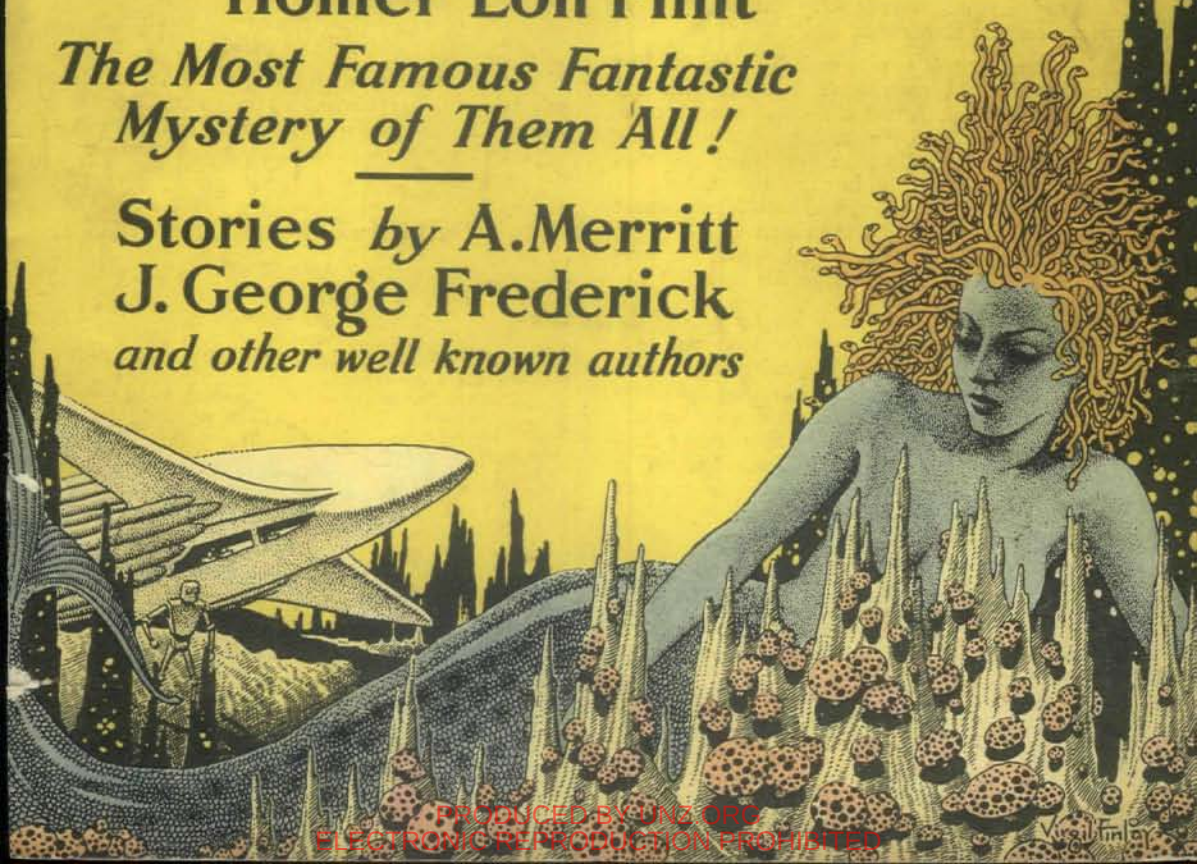
Stories by A. Merritt
J. George Frederick
and other well known authors



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Good News! for DANDRUFF SUFFERERS

Listerine Antiseptic Treatment Fights Infectious Dandruff
Clinical Tests Showed Marked Improvement in 76% of Cases

If you are troubled with infectious dandruff, give Listerine Antiseptic a chance to prove how helpful it can be...how quickly it attacks the infection and those humiliating scales...how fresh, clean, and invigorated it makes your scalp feel. Users everywhere acclaim its benefits.

The treatment is as easy as it is delightful. Just douse the scalp, morning and night, with full strength Listerine Antiseptic – the same Listerine Antiseptic that has been famous for 25 years as a mouth wash and gargle. Massage hair and scalp vigorously and persistently. In clinical tests, dandruff sufferers were delighted to find that this treatment brought rapid improvement in most cases.

Kills Bottle Bacillus

Dandruff is the most frequent scaly disease of the scalp. When this condition is due to germs, as is often the case, Listerine is especially fitted to aid you. It gives the scalp and hair a cooling and invigorating antiseptic bath... kills millions of germs associated with infectious dandruff, including Pityrosporum Ovale. This strange "bottle bacillus" is recognized by outstanding dandruff specialists as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

Improvement in 76% of Test Cases

Rabbits inoculated with Pityrosporum Ovale developed definite dandruff symptoms which disappeared shortly after being treated with Listerine Antiseptic daily.

And in a dandruff clinic, 76% of the men and women who used Listerine Antiseptic and massage twice a day showed complete disappearance of or marked improvement in the symptoms of dandruff within 30 days.

Don't Delay. Use Listerine Now

If you are troubled with dandruff, don't neglect what may be a real infection. Start with Listerine Antiseptic and massage right now – delay may aggravate the trouble. It's the method that has demonstrated its usefulness in a substantial majority of test cases.

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THE TREATMENT

MEN: Douse full strength Listerine Antiseptic on the scalp morning and night. **WOMEN:** Part the hair at various places, and apply Listerine Antiseptic right along the part with a medicine dropper, to avoid wetting the hair excessively.

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage with fingers or a good hair brush. Continue the treatment so long as dandruff is in evidence. And even though you're free from dandruff, enjoy a Listerine massage once a week to guard against infection.

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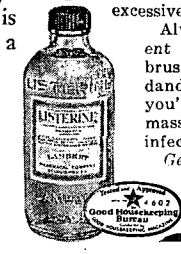

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Why Trained Accountants Command High Salaries

—and how ambitious men are qualifying by the La Salle Problem Method

GET this straight.

By "accountancy" we do not mean "bookkeeping." For accountancy begins where bookkeeping leaves off.

The skilled accountant takes the figures handed him by the bookkeeper, and *analyzes* and *interprets* them.

He knows how much the costs in the various departments should amount to, how they may be lowered.

He knows what profits should be expected from a given enterprise, how they may be increased.

He knows, in a given business, what per cent of one's working capital can safely be tied up in merchandise on hand, what per cent is safe and adequate for sales promotion. And these, by the way, are but two of *scores* of percentage-figures wherewith he points the way to successful operation.

He knows the intricacies of government taxation.

He knows how to *survey* the transactions of a business over a given period; how to show in cold, hard figures the progress it has made and where it is going. He knows how to *use* these findings as a basis for constructive policies.

In short, the trained accountant is the *controlling engineer* of business—one man business cannot do without.

Small wonder that he commands a salary two to ten times as great as that of the bookkeeper. Indeed, as an independent operator (head of his own accounting firm) he may earn as much as the president of the big and influential bank in his community, or the operating manager of a great railroad.

Some Examples

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Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

Vol. 1 MARCH, 1940 No. 6

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And a thrilling installment of "The Blind Spot" *by Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint*

ASTOUNDING!

The Blind Spot
Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint **6**
In Six Parts—Part I

AMAZING!

The Planet Juggler.....J. George Frederick **42**
He could control the stars in their courses

STRANGE!

Bomb from Beranga.....Harry Walton **69**
A young engineer's whole destiny was sealed inside it

THRILLING!

The Conquest of the Moon Pool..A. Merritt **82**
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Are there a few seconds of consciousness between life and death?

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Aztec pearls were the lure that took men into the swamp of doom, to wrestle with an unseen menace

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Cover Illustration, "Fantasy," by Virgil Finlay

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The April Issue Will Be On Sale March 6

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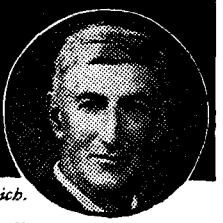
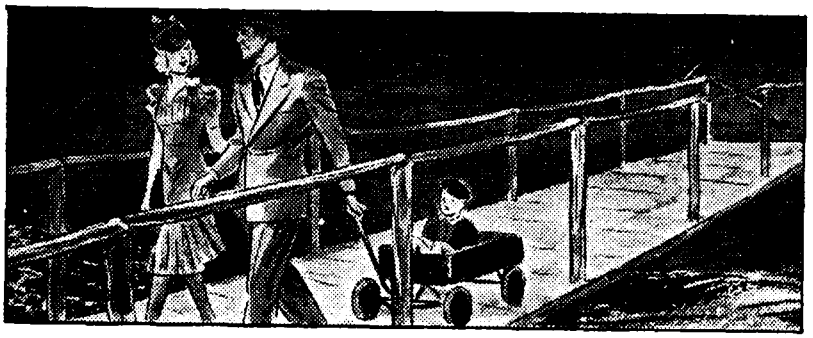
"BLACK, SWIRLING WATERS SWALLOWED OUR BABY!"



A true experience of GEORGE W. HOYT, *Litchfield, Mich.*



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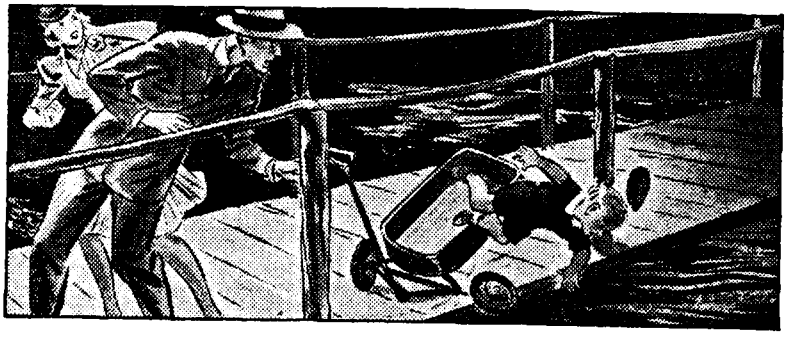

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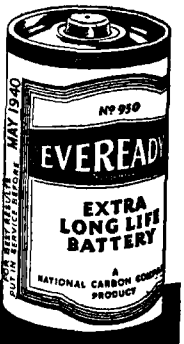

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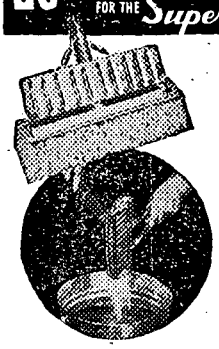

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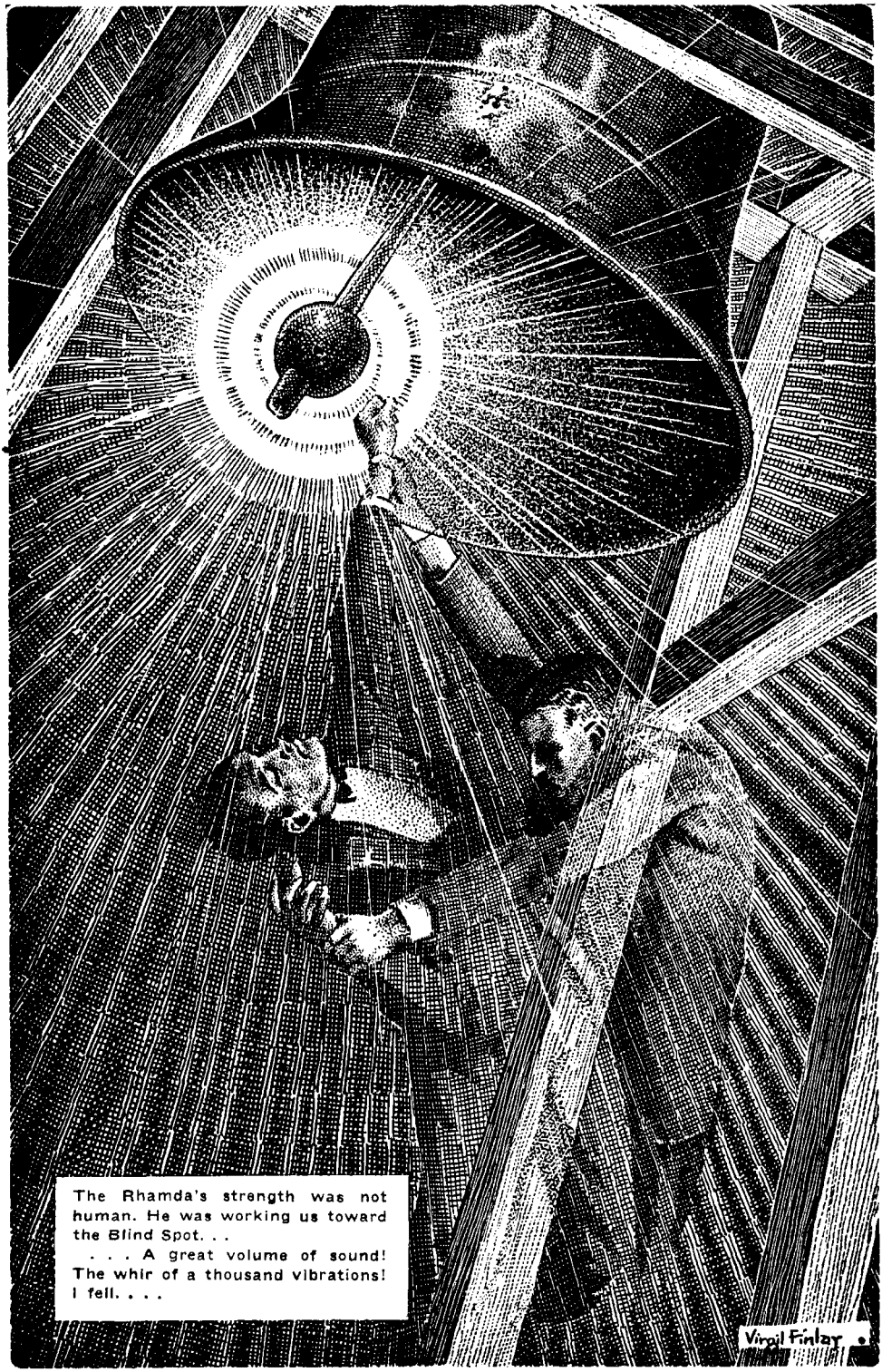
The Rhamda's strength was not human. He was working us toward the Blind Spot. . .
. . . A great volume of sound! The whir of a thousand vibrations! I fell. . . .
Virgil Finlay

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The Blind Spot

By AUSTIN HALL and HOMER EON FLINT

Part I

Where did that strange gateway lead?—beyond the door of Death?—to another adventurous world like our own?—or to the destruction of mankind?

PROLOGUE

PERHAPS it were just as well to start at the beginning. A mere matter of news.

All the world at the time knew the story; but for the benefit of those who have forgotten I shall repeat it. I am merely giving it as I have taken it from the papers with no elaboration and no opinion — a mere statement of facts. It was a celebrated case at the time and stirred the world to wonder. Indeed, it still is celebrated, though to the layman it is forgotten.

It has been labeled and indexed and filed away in the archives of the profession. To those who wish to look it up it will be spoken of as one of the great unsolved mysteries of the century. A crime that leads two ways, one into murder—sordid, cold, and calculating; and the other into the nebulous screen that thwarts us from the occult.

Perhaps it is the character of Dr. Holcomb that gives the latter. He was a great man and a splendid thinker. That he should have been led into a maze of cheap necromancy is, on the face, improbable. He had a wonderful mind. For years he had been battering down the skepticism that had bulwarked itself in the material.

He was a psychologist, and up to the day the greatest, perhaps, that we have known. He had a way of going out before his fellows—it is the way of genius— and he had gone far, indeed, before them. If we would trust Dr. Holcomb we have much to live for; our religion is not all hearsay and there is a great deal in science still unthought of. It is an unfortunate case; but there is much to be learned in the circumstance that led the great doctor into the Blind Spot.

CHAPTER I

RHAMDA

ON A certain foggy morning in September, 1905, a tall man wearing a black overcoat and bearing in one hand a small satchel of dark-reddish leather, descended from a Geary Street car at the foot of Market Street, San Francisco. It was a damp morning; a mist was brooding over the city blurring all distinctness, and even from the center of the loop the buildings facing East Street blurred in a dim, uncertain line.

The man glanced about him; a tall man of certain trim lines and distinctness and a quick, decided step and bearing. In the shuffle of descending passengers he was outstanding, a certain inborn grace that without the blood will never come from training. Men noticed and women out of instinct cast curious furtive glances and then turned away; which was natural, inasmuch as the man was plainly old. But for all that many ventured a second glance — and wondered.

An old man with the poise of twenty, a strange face of remarkable features, swarthy, of an Eastern cast, perhaps Indian; whatever the certainty of the man's age there was still a lingering suggestion of splendid youth. If one persisted in a third or fourth look this suggestion took

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almost a certain tone, the man's age dwindled, years dropped from him, and the quizzical smile that played on the lips seemed almost foreboding of boyish laughter.

We say foreboding because in this case it is not mistaken diction. Foreboding suggests coming evil; the laughter of boys is whole-hearted. It was merely that things were not exactly as they should be; it was not natural that age should be so youthful. The fates were playing, and in this case for once in the world's history their play was crosswise.

It is a remarkable case from the beginning and we are stating from facts. The man crossed to the window of the Key Route and purchased a ticket for Berkeley, after which, with the throng, he passed the turnstile and on to the boat that was waiting. He took the lower deck, not from choice, apparently, but more because the majority of his fellow passengers, being men, were bound in his direction. The same chance brought him to the cigar-stand. The men about him purchased cigars and cigarettes, and, as is the habit of all smokers, strolled off with delighted relish. The man watched them. Had any one noticed his eyes he would have noted a peculiar color and a light of surprise. With the prim step that made him so distinctive he advanced to the news-stand.

"Pardon me; but I would like to purchase one of those." Though he spoke perfect English it was in a strange manner, after the fashion of one who has found something that he has just learned how to use. At the same time he made a suggestion with his tapered fingers indicating the tobacco in the case and that already lighted by his companions. The clerk looked up.

"A cigar, sir? Yes, sir. What will it be?"

"A cigar?" Again the strange articulation. "Ah, yes, that is it. Now I remember. And it has a little sister, the cigarette. I think I shall take a cigarette, if—if—if you will show me how to use it."

It was a strange request. The clerk was accustomed to all manner of men and their brands of humor; he was about to answer in kind when he looked up and into the man's eyes. He started.

"You mean," he asked, "that you have never before seen a cigar or cigarette; that you do not know how to use them? A man as old as you are."

The stranger laughed. It was rather resentful, but for all of that of a hearty taint of humor.

"So old? Would you say that I am as old as that; if you will look again—"

The young man did and what he beheld is something that he could not quite account for: the strange conviction of this remarkable man; of age melting into youth, of an uncertain freshness, the smile, not of sixty, but of twenty. The young man was not one to argue, whatever his wonder; he was first of all a lad of business; he could merely acquiesce.

"The first time! This is the first time you have ever seen a cigar or cigarette?"

The stranger nodded.

"The first time. I have never beheld one of them before this morning. If you will allow me?" He indicated a package. "I think I shall take one of these."

THE clerk took up the package, opened the end, and shook out a single cigarette. The man rolled it in his hand after the manner of the others; then he lighted it and, as the smoke poured out of his mouth, held the cigarette tentatively in his fingers.

"Like it?" It was the clerk who asked.

The other did not answer, his whole face was the expression of having just discovered one of the senses. He was a splendid man and, if the word may be employed of the sterner sex, one of beauty. His features were even: that is to be noted, his nose chiseled straight and to perfection, the eyes of a peculiar somberness and luster almost burning, of a black of such intensity as to verge into red and to be devoid of pupils, and yet, for all of that, of a glow and softness. After a moment he turned to the clerk.

"You are young, my lad."

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"Twenty-one, sir."

"You are fortunate. You live in a wonderful age. It is as wonderful as your tobacco. And you still have many great things before you."

"Yes, sir."

The man walked on to the forward part of the boat; leaving the lad, who had been in a sort of daze, watching. But it was not for long. The whole thing had been strange and to the lad almost inexplicable. The man was not insane, he was certain; and he was just as sure that he had not been joking. From the start he had been taken by the man's refinement; he was one of intellect and education; he was positive that he had been sincere. Yet—

The ferry detective happened at that moment to be passing. The clerk made an indication with his thumb.

"That man yonder," he spoke, "the one in black. Watch him." Then he told his story. Whereat the detective laughed and walked forward.

It is a most fortunate incident. It was a strange case. That mere act of the cigar clerk placed the police on the track and gave to the world the only clue that it holds of the Blind Spot.

The detective had laughed at the lad's recital—most any one had a patent for being queer—and if this gentleman had a whim for a certain brand of humor that was his business. Nevertheless, he would stroll forward.

The man was not hard to distinguish; he was standing on the forward deck facing the wind and peering through the mist at the gray, heavy heave of the water. Alongside of them the dim shadow of a sister ferry screamed its way through the fogbank. That he was a landsman was evidenced by his way of standing; he was uncertain; at every heave of the boat he would shift sidewise. An unusually heavy roll caught him slightly off-balance and jostled him against the detective. The latter held up his hand and caught him by the arm.

"A bad morning," spoke the officer. "B-r-r-r! Did you notice the Yerba Buena yonder? She just grazed us. A bad morning."

The stranger turned. As the detective caught the splendid face, the glowing eyes and the youthful smile, he started much as had done the cigar clerk. The same effect of age melting into youth and—the officer being much more accustomed to reading men—a queer sense of latent and potent vision. The eyes were soft and receptive, but for all that of the delicate strength and color that comes from abnormal intellect. He noted the pupils, black, glowing, of great size, almost filling the iris and the whole melting into intensity that verged into red. Either the man had been long without sleep or he was one of unusual intelligence and vitality.

"A nasty morning," repeated the officer.

"Ah! Er, yes—did you say it was a nasty morning? Indeed, I do not know, sir. However, it is very interesting."

"Stranger in San Francisco?"

"Well, yes. At least, I have never seen it."

"H-m!" The detective was a bit nonplussed by the man's evident evasion. "Well, if you are a stranger I suppose it is up to me to come to the defense of my city. This is one of Frisco's fogs. We have them occasionally. Sometimes they last for days. This one is a low one. It will lift presently. Then you will see the sun. Have you ever seen Frisco's sun?"

"My dear sir"—this same slow articulation—"I have never seen your sun nor any other."

"Hum!"

It was an answer altogether unexpected. Again the officer found himself gazing into the strange, refined face and wonderful eyes. The man was not blind, of that he was certain. Neither was his voice harsh nor testy. Rather was it soft and polite, of one merely stating a fact. Yet how could it be? He remembered the cigar clerk. Neither cigar nor sun! Of what manner of land could the man come from? A detective has a certain gift of intuition. Though on the face of it, outside of the

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man's personality, there could be nothing to it but a joke, he chose to act upon the impulse. He pulled back the door which had been closed behind them and reentered the boat. When he returned the boat arrived at the pier.

"You are going to Oakland?"

It was a chance question.

"No, to Berkeley. I take a train here, I understand. Do all the trains go to Berkeley?"

"By no means. I am going to Berkeley myself. We can ride together. My name is Jerome. Albert Jerome."

"Thanks. Mine is Avec. Rhamda Avec. I am much obliged. Your company may be instructive."

HE DID not say more; but watched with unrestrained interest their maneuver into the slip. A moment later they were marching with the others through the ways to the trains that were waiting. Just as they were seated and the electric was pulling out of the pier the sun breaking through the mist blazed with splendid light through the cloud rifts. The stranger was next to the window where he could look out over the water and beyond at the citied shoreline, whose sea of housetops extended and serried to the peaks of the first foot-hills. The sun was just coming over the mountains.

The detective watched. There was sincerity in the man's actions. It was not acting. When the light first broke he turned his eyes full into the radiance. It was the act of a child and, so it struck the officer, of the same trust and simplicity—and likewise the same effect. He drew away quickly; for a moment blinded.

"Ah!" he said. "It is so. This is the sun. Your sun is wonderful!"

"Indeed it is," returned the other. "But rather common. We see it every day. It's the whole works, but we get used to it. For myself I cannot see anything strange in the 'sun's still shining.' You have been blind, Mr. Avec? Pardon the question. But I must naturally infer. You say you have never seen the sun. I suppose—"

He stopped because of the other's smile; somehow it seemed a very superior one, as if predicting a wealth of wisdom.

"My dear Mr. Jerome," he spoke, "I have never been blind in my life. I say it is wonderful! It is glorious and past describing. So is it all, your water, your boats, your ocean. But I see there is one thing even stranger still. It is yourselves. With all your greatness you are only part of your surroundings. Do you know what is your sun?"

"Search me," returned the officer. "I'm no astronomer. I understand they don't know themselves. Fire, I suppose, and a hell of a hot one! But there is one thing that I can tell."

"And this—"

"Is the truth."

If he meant it for insinuation it was ineffective. The other smiled kindly. In the fine effect of the delicate features, and most of all in the eyes was sincerity. In that face was the mark of genius—he felt it—and of a potent superior intelligence. Most of all did he note the beauty and the soft, silky superluster of the eyes.

We have the whole thing from Jerome, at least this part of it; and our interest being retrospect is multiplied far above that of the detective. The stranger had a certain call of character and of appearance, not to say magnetism. The officer felt himself almost believing and yet restraining himself into caution of unbelief. It was a remark preposterous on the face of it. What puzzled Jerome was the purpose; he could think of nothing that would necessitate such statements and acting. He was certain that the man was sane.

In the light of what came after great stress has been laid by a certain class upon this incident. We may say that we lean neither way. We have merely given it in some detail because of that importance. We have yet no proof of the mystic and, until it is proved, we must lean, like Jerome, upon the cold material. We have the mystery, but, even at that, we have not the certainty of murder.

Understand, it was intuition that led

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Jerome into that memorable trip to Berkeley; he happened to be going off duty and was drawn to the man by a chance incident and the fact of his personality. At this minute, however, he thought no more of him than as an eccentric, as some refined, strange, wonderful gentleman with a whim for his own brand of humor. Only that could explain it. The man had an evident curiosity for everything about him, the buildings, the street, the cars, and the people. Frequently he would mutter: "Wonderful, wonderful, and all the time we have never known it. Wonderful!"

As they drew into Lorin the officer ventured a question.

"You have friends in Berkeley. I see you are a stranger. If I may presume, perhaps I may be of assistance?"

"Well, yes, if—if—do you know of a Dr. Holcomb?"

"You mean the professor. He lives on Dwight Way. At this time of the day you would be more apt to find him at the university. Is he expecting you?"

It was a blunt question and of course none of his business. Yet, just what another does not want him to know is ever the pursuit of a detective. At the same time the subconscious flashing and wondering at the name Rhamda Avec—surely neither Teutonic nor Sanscrit nor anything between.

"Expecting me? Ah, yes. Pardon me if I speak slowly. I am not quite used to speech—yet. I see you are interested. After I see Dr. Holcomb I may tell you. However, it is very urgent that I see the doctor. He—well, I may say that we have known each other a long time."

"Then you know him?"

"Yes, in a way; though we have never met. He must be a great man. We have much in common, your doctor and I; and we have a great deal to give to your world. However, I would not recognize him should I see him. Would you by any chance—"

"You mean would I be your guide? With pleasure. It just occurs that I am on friendly terms with your friend Dr. Holcomb."

CHAPTER II

THE PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY

AND now to start in on another angle. There is hardly any necessity for introducing Dr. Holcomb. All of us, at least, those who read, and, most of all, those of us who are interested in any manner of speculation, knew him quite well. He was the professor of philosophy at the University of California: a great man and a good one, one of those fine academic souls who, not only by their wisdom, but by their character, have a way of stamping themselves upon generations; a speaker of the upstanding class, walking on his own feet and utterly fearless when it came to dashing out on some startling philosophy that had not been borne up by his forebears.

He was original. He believed that the philosophies of the ages are but stepping stones, that the wisdoms of the earth looked but to the future, and that the study of the classics, however essential, are but the ground work for combining and working out the problems of the future. He was epigrammatic, terse, and gifted with a quaint humor with which he was apt, even when in the driest philosophy, to drive in and clinch his argument.

Best of all, he was able to clothe the most abstract thoughts in language so simple and concrete that he brought the deepest of all subjects down to the scope of the commonest thinker. It is needless to say that he was copy. The papers about the bay were ever and anon running some startling story of the professor.

Had they stuck to the text it would all have been well; but a reporter is a reporter; in spite of the editors there were numerous little elaborations to pervert the contex. A great man must be careful of his speech. Dr. Holcomb was often busy refuting; he could not understand the need of these little twistings of wisdom. It kept him in controversy; the brothers of his profession often took him to task for these little distorted scraps of philosophy. He

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did not like journalism. He had a way of consigning all writers and editors to the devil.

Which was vastly amusing to the reporters. Once they had him going they poised their pens in glee and began splashing their venomous ink. It was tragic; the great professor standing at bay to his tormentors. One and all they loved him and one and all they took delight in his torture. It was a hard task for a reporter to get in at a lecture; and yet it was often the lot of the professor to find himself and his words featured in his breakfast paper.

On the very day before this the doctor had come out with one of his terse startling statements. He had a way of inserting parenthetically some of his scraps of wisdom. It was in Ethics 2b. We quote his words as near as possible:

"Man, let me tell you, is egotistic. All our philosophy is based on ego. We live threescore years and we balance it with all eternity. We are it. Did you ever stop and think of eternity? It is a rather long time. What right have we to say that life, which we assume to be everlasting, immediately becomes retrospect once it passes out of the conscious individuality which it is allotted upon this earth? The trouble is ourselves. We are five-sensed. We weigh everything with our senses. Everything! We so measure eternity. Until we step out into other senses, which undoubtedly exist, we shall never arrive at the conception of infinity. Now I am going to make a rather startling announcement.

"The past few years have promised a culmination which has been guessed at and yearned for since the beginning of time. It is within, and still without, the scope of metaphysics. Those of you who have attended my lectures have heard me call myself the material idealist. I am a mystic sensationalist. I believe that we can derive nothing from pure contemplation. There is mystery and wonder in the veil of the occult. The earth, our life, is merely a vestibule of the universe. Contemplation alone will hold us all as inapt and as impotent as the old Monks of Athos. We have mountains of literature behind us, all contemplative, and whatever its wisdom, it has given us not one thing outside of the abstract. From Plato down to the present our philosophy has given us not one tangible proof, not one concrete fact which we can place our hands on. We are virtually where we were originally; and we can talk, talk, talk from now until the clap of doomsday.

"What then?

"My friends, philosophy must take a step sidewise. In this modern age young science, practical science, has grown up and far surpassed us. We must go back to the beginning, forget our subjective musings and enter the concrete. We are five-sensed, and in the nature of things we must bring the proof down into the concrete where we can understand it. Can we pierce the nebulous screen that shuts us out of the occult? We have doubted, laughed at ourselves and been laughed at; but the fact remains that always we have persisted in the believing.

"I have said that we shall never, never understand infinity while within the limitations of our five senses. I repeat it. But that does not infer that we shall never solve some of the mystery of life. The occult is not only a supposition, but a fact. We have peopled it with terror, because, like our forebears before Columbus, we have peopled it with imagination.

"And now to my statement.

"I have called myself the Material Idealist. I have adopted an entirely new trend of philosophy. During the past years, unknown to you and unknown to my friends, I have allied myself with practical science. I desired something concrete. While my colleagues and others were pounding out tomes of wonderful sophistry I have been pounding away at the screen of the occult. This is a proud moment. I have succeeded. Tomorrow I shall bring to you the fact and the substance. I have lifted up the curtain and flooded it with the light of day. You shall have the fact for your senses. Tomorrow I shall explain it all.

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I shall deliver my greatest lecture; in which my whole life has come to a focus. It is not spiritualism nor sophistry. It is concrete fact and common sense. The subject of my lecture tomorrow will be: 'The Blind Spot.' "

HERE begins the second part of the mystery.

We know now that the great lecture was never delivered. Immediately the news was scattered out of the class-room upon the campus. It became common property. It was spread over the country and was featured in all the great metropolitan dailies. In the lecture-room next morning seats were at a premium; students, professors, instructors and all the prominent people who could gain admission crowded into the hall; even the irrepressible reporters had stolen in to take down this greatest scoop of the century. The place was jammed until even standing room was unthought of. The crowd, dense and packed physically uncomfortable, waited.

The minutes dragged by. It was a long, long wait. But at last the bell rang that ticked the hour. Every one was expectant. And then fifteen minutes passed by, twenty —the crowd settled down to waiting. At length one of the colleagues stepped into the doctor's office and telephoned to his home. His daughter answered.

"Papa? Why he left over two hours ago for the campus."

"About what time?"

"Why, it was about seven-thirty. You know he was to deliver his lecture to-day on the Blind Spot. I wanted to hear it, but he told me I could have it at home. He said he was to have a wonderful guest and I must make ready to receive him. Isn't papa there?"

"Not yet. Who was this guest? Did he say?"

"Oh, yes! In a way. A most wonderful man. And he gave him a wonderful name, Rhamda Avec. I remember because it is so funny. I asked papa if he was Sanscrit; and he said he was much older than that. Just imagine!"

"Did your father have his lecture with him?"

"Oh, yes. He glanced over it at breakfast. He told me he was going to startle the world as it had never been since the day of Columbus."

"Indeed."

"Yes. And he was terribly impatient. He said he had to be at the college before eight to receive the great man. He was to deliver his lecture at ten. And afterward he would have lunch at noon and he would give me the whole story. I am all impatience."

"Thank you."

Then he came back and made the announcement that there was a little delay; but that Dr. Holcomb would be there shortly. But he was not. At twelve o'clock there were still some people waiting. At one o'clock the last man had slipped out of the room—and wondered. In all the country there was but one person who knew. That one was an obscure man who had yielded to a detective's intuition and had fallen inadvertently upon one of the greatest mysteries of modern times.

CHAPTER III

"NOW THERE ARE TWO"

THE rest of the story is unfortunately all too easily told. We go back to Jerome and his strange companion.

At Center Street station they alighted and walked up to the campus. Under the Le Conte oaks they met the professor. He was trim and happy, his short, well-built figure clothed in black, his snow-white whiskers trimmed to the usual square crop and his pink skin glowing with splendid health. The fog had by this time lifted and the sun was just beginning to overcome the chilliness of the air; on the elevation beyond them the buildings of the great university; and back of it all the huge C upon the face of Charter Hill. There was no necessity for an introduction.

The two men apparently recognized each other at once. So we have it from the detective. There was sincerity in the delight

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of their hand-clasp. A strange pair, both of them with the distinction and poise that come from refinement and intellectual training; though in physique they were almost opposite, there was still a strange, almost mutual, bond between them. The professor was short, well-set, and venerable; his white hairs matched well the dignity of his wisdom. The other was tall, lithe, graceful, and of that illusive poise that blended into youthfulness. His hair was black; his features well cut, and of the slightly swarthy tinge that suggested an Eastern extraction. Unlike the professor, his face was smooth; he had no trace of beard and very little evidence that he could grow one. Dr. Holcomb was beaming.

"At last!" he greeted. "At last! I was sure we could not fail. This, my dear Dr. Avec, is the greatest day since Columbus."

The other took the hand.

"So this is the great Dr. Holcomb. Yes, indeed, it is a great day; though I know nothing about your Columbus. So far it has been simply wonderful. I can scarcely credit my senses. So near and yet so far. How can it be? A dream? Are you sure, Dr. Holcomb?"

"My dear Rhamda, I am sure that I am the happiest man that ever lived. It is the culmination. I was certain we could not fail; though, of course, to me also it is an almost impossible climax of fact. I should never have succeeded without your assistance."

The other smiled.

"That was of small account, my dear doctor. To yourself must go the credit; to me the pleasure. Take your sun, for instance, I—but I have not the language to tell you."

But the doctor had gone to abstraction.

"A great day," he was beaming. "A great day! What will the world say? It is proved." Then suddenly: "You have eaten?"

"Not yet. You must allow me a bit of time. I thought of it; but I had not quite the courage to venture."

"Then we shall eat," said the other man. "Afterward we shall go up to the lecture-room. To-day I shall deliver my lecture on the Blind Spot. And when I am through you shall deliver the words that will astonish the world."

But here it seems there was a hitch. The other shook his head kindly. It was evident that while the doctor was the leader the other was a co-worker who must be considered.

"I am afraid, professor, that you have promised a bit too much. I am not entirely free yet, you know. Two hours is the most that I can give you; and not entirely that. There are some details that may not be neglected. It is a far venture and now that we have succeeded this far there is surely no reason why we cannot go on. However, it is necessary that I return to the house on Chatterton Place. I have but slightly over an hour remaining."

The doctor was plainly disappointed.

"But the lecture?"

"It means my life, professor, and the subsequent success of our experiment. A few details, a few minutes. Perhaps if we hurry we can get back in time."

The doctor glanced at his watch. "Twenty minutes for the train, twenty for the boat, ten minutes; that's an hour, two hours. These details? Have you any idea how long, Rhamda?"

"Perhaps not more than fifteen minutes."

"We have still two hours. Fifteen minutes; perhaps a little bit late. Tell you what. I shall go with you. You can eat upon the boat."

We have said that the detective had intuition. He had it still. Yet he had no rational reason for suspecting either the professor or his strange companion. Furthermore he had never heard of the Blind Spot in any way whatsoever; nor did he know a single thing of philosophy or anything else in Holcomb's teaching. He knew the doctor as a man of eminent standing and respectability. It was hardly natural that he should suspect anything sinister to grow out of this meeting of two refined scholars. He attached no great importance to the trend of their conversation. It was

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strange to be sure; but he felt, no doubt, that living in their own world they had a way and a language of their own. He was no scholar.

Still, he could think. The man Rhamda had made an assertion that he could not quite uncover. It puzzled him. As we say, he had intuition. Something told him that for the safety of his old friend it might be well for him to shadow the strange pair to the city.

When the next train pulled out for the pier the two scholars were seated in the forward part of the car. In the last seat was a man deeply immersed in a morning paper.

It is rather unfortunate. In the natural delicacy of the situation Jerome could not crowd too closely. He had no certainty of trouble; no proof whatever; he was known to the professor. The best he could do was to keep aloof and follow their movements. At the ferry building they hailed a taxi and started up Market Street. Jerome watched them. In another moment he had another driver and was winding behind in their wheel tracks. The cab made straight for Chatterton Place. In front of a substantial two-story house it drew up. The two old men alighted. Jerome's taxi passed them. They were at the head of the steps; a woman of slender beauty with a wonderful loose fold of black hair was talking. It seemed to the detective that her voice was fearful, of a pregnant warning, that she was protesting. Nevertheless, the old men entered and the door slammed behind them. Jerome slipped from the taxi and spoke a few words to the chauffeur. A moment later the two men were holding the house under surveillance.

They did not have long to wait. The man called Rhamda had asked for fifteen minutes. At the stroke of the second the front door reopened. Some one was laughing; a melodious enchanting laugh and feminine. A woman was speaking. And then two forms in the doorway. A man and a woman. The man was Rhamda Avec, tall, immaculate, black clad and distinguished. The woman, Jerome was not certain that she was the same who opened the door or not; she was even more beautiful. She was laughing. Like her companion she was clad in black, a beautiful shimmering material which sparkled in the sun like the rarest silk. The man glanced carelessly up and down the street for a moment. Then he assisted the lady down the steps and into the taxi. The door slammed; and before the detective could gather his scattered wits they were lost in the city.

Jerome was expecting the professor. Naturally when the door opened he looked for the old gentleman and his companion. It was the doctor he was watching, not the other. Though he had no rational reason for expecting trouble he had still his hunch and his intuition. The man and woman aroused suspicion; and likewise upset his calculation. He could not follow them and stay with the professor. It was a moment for quick decision. He wondered. Where was Dr. Holcomb? This was the day he was to deliver his lecture on the Blind Spot. He had read the announcement in the paper coming over on the boat, together with certain comments by the editor. In the lecture itself there was mystery. This strange one, Rhamda, was mixed in the Blind Spot. Undoubtingly he was the essential fact and substance. Until now he had not scented tragedy. Why had Rhamda and the woman come out together? Where was the professor?

Where indeed?

AT THE end of a half-hour Jerome ventured across the street. He noted the number 288. Then he ascended the steps and clanged at the knocker. From the sounds that came from inside, the place was but partly furnished. Hollow steps sounded down the hallway, shuffling, like weary bones dragging slippers. The door opened and an old woman, very old, peered out of the crack. She coughed. Though it was not a loud cough it seemed to the detective that it would be her last one; there was so little of her.

"Pardon me, but is Dr. Holcomb here?"

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The old lady looked up at him. The eyes were of a blank expressionless blue; she was in her dotage.

"You mean—oh, yes, I think so, the pretty man with the white whiskers. He was here a few minutes ago, with that other. But he just went out, sir, he just went out."

"No, I don't think so. There was a man went out and a woman. But not Dr. Holcomb."

"A woman? There was no woman."

"Oh, yes, there was a woman—a very beautiful one."

The old lady dropped her hand. It was trembling.

"Oh, dear," she was saying. "This makes two. This morning it was a man and now it is a woman, that makes two."

It seemed to the man as he looked down in her eyes that he was looking into great fear; she was so slight and frail and helpless and so old; such a fragile thing to bear burden and trouble. Her voice was cracked and just above a shrill whisper, almost uncanny. She kept repeating:

"Now there are two. Now there are two. That makes two. This morning there was one. Now there are two."

Jerome could not understand. He pitied the old lady.

"Did you say that Dr. Holcomb is here?"

Again she looked up: the same blank expression, she was evidently trying to gather her wits.

"Two. A woman. Dr. Holcomb. Oh, yes, Dr. Holcomb. Won't you come in?"

She opened the door.

Jerome entered and took off his hat. Judicially he repeated the doctor's name to keep it in her mind. She closed the door carefully and touched his arm. It seemed to him that she was terribly weak and tottering; her old eyes, however expressionless, were full of pitiful pleading. She was scarcely more than a shadow.

"You are his son?"

Jerome lied; but he did it for a reason. "Yes."

"Then come."

She took him by the sleeve and led him to a room, then across it to a door in the side wall. Her step was slow and tottering; twice she stopped to sing the dirge of her wonder. "First a man and then a woman. Now there is one. You are his son." And twice she stopped and listened. "Do you hear anything? A bell? I love to hear it: and then afterward I am afraid. Did you ever notice a bell? It always makes you think of church and the things that are holy. This is a beautiful bell—first—"

Either the woman was without her reason or very nearly so: she was very weak and tottering.

"Come, mother, I know, first a bell, but Dr. Holcomb?"

The name brought her back again. For a moment she was blank trying to recall her senses. And then she remembered. She pointed to the door.

"In there—Dr. Holcomb. That's where they come. That's where they go. Dr. Holcomb. The little old man with the beautiful whiskers. This morning it was a man; now it is a woman. Now there are two. Oh, dear; perhaps we shall hear the bell."

Jerome began to scent a tragedy. Certainly the old lady was uncanny; the house was bare and hollow; the scant furniture was threadbare with age and mildew; each sound was exaggerated and fearful, even their breathing. He placed his hand on the knob and opened the door.

"Now there are two. Now there are two."

The room was empty. Not a bit of furniture; a blank, bare apartment with an old-fashioned high ceiling. Nothing else. Whatever the weirdness and adventure Jerome was getting nowhere. The old lady was still clinging to his arm and still droning:

"Now there are two. Now there are two. This morning a man; now a woman. Now there are two."

"Come, mother, come. This will not do. Perhaps—"

But just then the old lady's lean fingers clinched into his arm; her eyes grew

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bright; her mouth opened and she stopped in the middle of her drone. Jerome grew rigid. And no wonder. From the middle of the room not ten feet way came the tone of a bell, a great silvery voluminous sound—and music. A church bell. Just one stroke, full toned, filling all the air till the whole room was choked with music. Then as suddenly it died out and runed into nothing. At the same time he felt the fingers on his arm relax; and a heap at his feet. He reached over. The life and intelligence that was so near the line was just crossing over the border. The poor old lady! Here was a tragedy he could not understand. He stooped over to assist her. He was trembling. As he did so he heard the drone of her soul as it wafted to the shadow:

"Now there are two."

CHAPTER IV

GONE

JEROME was a strong man, of iron nerve, and well set against emotion; in the run of his experience he had been plumped into many startling situations; but none like this. The croon of the old lady thrummed in his ears with endless repetition. He picked her up tenderly and bore her to another room and placed her on a ragged sofa. There were still marks on her face of former beauty. He wondered who she was and what had been her life to come to such an ending.

"Now there are two," the words were withering with oppression. Subconsciously he felt the load that crushed her spirit. It was as if the burden had been shifted; he sensed the weight of an unaccountable disaster.

The place was musty and ill-lighted. He looked about him, the dank, close air was unwashed by daylight. A stray ray of sunshine filtering through the broken shutter slanted across the room and sought vainly to dispel the shadow. He thought of Dr. Holcomb. Dr. Holcomb and the old lady. "Now there are two." Was it a double tragedy? First of all he must investigate.

The place was of eleven rooms, six downstairs and five on the upper story. With the exception of one broken chair there was no furniture upstairs; four of the rooms on the lower floor were partly furnished, two not at all. A rear room had evidently been to the old lady the whole of her habitation, serving as kitchen, bedroom, and living-room combined. Except in this room there were no carpets whatever. His steps sounded hollow and ghostly; the boards creaked and each time he opened a door he was oppressed by the same gloom of dankness and stagnation. There was no trace of Dr. Holcomb.

He remembered the bell and sought vainly on both floors for anything that would give him a clue to the sound. There was nothing. The only thing he heard was the echoing of his own creaking footsteps and the unceasing blur that thrummed in his spirit, "Now there are two."

At last he came to the door and looked out into the street. The sun was shining and the life and pulse was rising from the city. It was daylight; plain, healthy day. It was good to look at. On the threshold of the door he felt himself standing on the border of two worlds. What had become of the doctor and who was the old lady; and lastly and just as important who was the Rhamda and his beautiful companion?

Jerome telephoned to headquarters.

It is a strange case.

At the precise minute when his would-be auditors were beginning to fidget over his absence the police of San Francisco had started the search for the great doctor. Jerome had followed his intuition. It had led him into a tragedy and he was ready to swear almost on his soul that it was twofold. The prominence of the professor, together with his startling announcement of the day previous and the world-wide comment that it had aroused, elevated the case to a national interest.

Dr. Holcomb had promised to tear away the veil of the occult. He was not a man to talk idly. The world had long regarded him as one of its greatest thinkers. It was

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a mystery that had shrouded over the ages. Since man first blubbered out of apehood he had fought with this great riddle of infinity. And now, in the lecture on the Blind Spot, was promised the great solution; and not only the solution, but the fact and substance to back it.

What was the Blind Spot? The world conjectured, and, like the world has been since beginning, it scoffed and derided. Some there were, however, men well up in the latest discoveries of science, who did not laugh. They counseled forbearance; they would wait for the doctor and his lecture.

There was no lecture. In the teeth of our expectation came the startling word that the doctor had disappeared. Apparently when on the very verge of announcing his discovery he had been swallowed by the very force that he had loosened. There was nothing in known science, outside of optics, that could in any way be blended with the Blind Spot. There were but two solutions; either the professor had been a victim of a clever rogue, or he had been overcome by the rashness of his own wisdom. At any rate, it was known from that minute on as "THE BLIND SPOT."

PERHAPS it is just as well to take up the findings of the police. The police of course eluded from the beginning any suggestion of the occult. They are material; and were convinced from the start that the case had its origin in downright villainy. Man is complex; but being so, is oft overbalanced by evil. Some genius had made a fool of the doctor.

In the first place a thorough search was made for the professor. The place at No. 288 Chatterton Place was ransacked from cellar to attic. The records were gone over and it was found that the property had for some time been vacant; that the real ownership was vested in a number of heirs scattered about the country.

The old lady had apparently been living on the place simply through sufferance. No one could find out who she was. A few tradesmen in the vicinity had sold her some scant supplies and that was all. The stress that Jerome placed upon her actions and words was given due account of. There were undoubtedly two villains; but also there were two victims. That the old lady was such as well as the professor no one has doubted. The whole secret lay in the strange gentleman with the Eastern cast and complexion. Who was Rhamda Avec?

And now comes the strangest part of the story. Ever, when we recount the tale there is something to overturn the theories of the police. It has become a sort of legend in San Francisco; one to be taken with a grain of salt, to be sure, but for all that, one at which we may well wonder. Here the supporters of the professor's philosophy hold their strongest point—if it is true. Of course we can venture no private opinion, never having witnessed. It is this:

Rhamda Avec is with us and in our city. His description and drawn likeness has been published many times. There are those who aver that they have seen him in the reality of the flesh walking through the crowds of Market Street.

He is easily distinguished, tall and distinctive, refined to an ultra degree, and with the poise and alertness of a gentleman of reliance and character. Women look twice and wonder; he is neither old nor young; when he smiles it is like youth breaking in laughter. And with him often is his beautiful companion.

Men vouch for her beauty and swear that it is of the super kind that drives to distraction. She is fire and flesh and carnal —she is superbeauty. There is allurement about her body; sylphlike, sinuous; the olive tint of her complexion, the wonderful glory of her hair and the glowing night-black of her eyes. Men pause; she is of the superlative kind that rob the reason, a supreme glory of passion and life and beauty, at whose feet fools and wise men would slavishly frolic and folly. She seldom speaks; but those who have heard her say that it is like rippling water, of gentleness and softness and of the mellow flow that comes from love and passion and from beauty.

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Of course there is nothing out of the ordinary in their walking down the streets. Anybody might do that. The wonder comes in the manner in which they elude the police. They come and go in the broad, bright daylight. Hundreds have seen them. They make no effort at concealment, nor disguise. And yet no fantoms were ever more unreal than they to those who seek them. Who are they? The officers have been summoned on many occasions; but each and every time in some manner or way they have contrived to elude them. There are some who have consigned them to the limbo of illusion. But we do not entirely agree.

In a case like this it is well to take into consideration the respectability and character of those who have witnessed. Fantoms are not corporeal; these two are flesh and blood. There is mystery about them; but they are substance, the same as we are. All the secrets of the universe have not been unriddled by any means. We believe in Dr. Holcomb; and whether it was murder or mystery, we do not think we shall solve it until we have discovered the laws and the clues that led the great doctor up to the Blind Spot.

And lastly:

If you will take the Key Route ferry some foggy morning you may see something to convince you. It must be foggy and the air must be gray and drab and somber. Take the lower deck. Perhaps you shall see nothing. If not try again; for they say you shall be rewarded. Watch the forward part of the boat; but do not leave the inner deck. The great Rhamda watching the gray swirl of the water!

He stands alone, in his hands the case of reddish leather, his feet slightly apart and his face full of a great hungry wonder. Watch his features: they are strong and aglow with a great and wondrous wisdom; mark if you see evil. And, remember. Though he is like you he is something vastly different. He is flesh and blood; but perhaps the master of one of the greatest laws that man can attain to. He is the fact and the substance that was promised, but was not delivered by the professor.

This account has been taken from one of the Sunday editions of our papers. I do not agree with it entirely. Nevertheless, it will serve as an excellent foundation for my own adventures; and what is best of all, save labor.

CHAPTER V

PALS

MY NAME is Harry Wendel.

I am an attorney and until recently boasted of a splendid practice and an excellent prospect for the future. I am still a young man; I have a good education and still have friends and admirers. Such being the case, you no doubt wonder why I give a past inference to my practice and what the future might hold for me. Listen:

I might as well start 'way back. I shall do it completely and go back to the fast-receding time that glowed with childhood.

The first that I can remember is a wriggling ornery mess of curls and temper; for be it known, I have from the beginning been of that passionate vindictive stamp that surcharges the hot emotions of life into high moments.

It is a recollection of childish disaster —I go 'way back. I had been making strenuous efforts to pull the tail out of the cat that I might use it for a feather duster. My desire was supreme logic. I could not understand objection; the cat resisted for certain utilitarian reasons of its own and my mother through humane sympathy. I had been scratched and spanked in addition: it was the first storm center that I remember. I had been punished but not subdued. At the first opportunity I stole out of the house and onto the lawn that stretched out to the sidewalk.

I remember the day. The sun was shining, the sky was clear, and everything was green with springtime. For a minute I stood still and blinked in the sunlight. It was beautiful and soft and balmy; the world at full exuberance; the buds upon the

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trees, the flowers, and the song-birds singing. I could not understand it. It was so beautiful and soft. My heart was still beating fiercely, still black with perversity and stricken rancor. The world had no right to be so. I hated with the full rush of childish anger.

And then I saw.

Across the street coming over to meet me was a child of my age. He was fat and chubby, a mass of yellow curls and laughter; when he walked he held his feet out at angles as is the maner of fat boys and his arms away from his body; he had on his first pair of pants and a white blouse like I wore on Sunday. I slid off the porch quietly. Here was something that could suffer for the cat and my mother. At my rush he stopped in wonder. I remember his smiling face and my anger. In an instant I had him by the hair and was biting with all the fury of vindictiveness.

At first he set up a great bawl for assistance. He was fat and passive, a beautiful, good-natured child. He could not understand; he screamed and held his hands aloft to keep them out of my reach. Then he tried to run away. But I had learned from the cat that had scratched me. I clung on, biting, tearing. It was good to rend him, to rip off his blouse and collar; the shrill of his scream was music: it was conflict, sweet and delicious; it was strife, swift as instinct.

At last I stopped him; he ceased trying to get away and began to struggle. It was better still; it was resistance. But he was stronger than I; though I was quicker he managed to get me by the shoulders, to force me back, and finally to upset me. Then in the stolid way, and after the manner of fat boys, he sat upon my chest. When our startled mothers came upon the scene they so found us — I upon my back, clinching my teeth and threatening all the dire fates of childhood, and he waiting either for assistance or until my ire should retire sufficiently to allow him to release me in safety.

"Who did it? Who started it?"

That I remember plainly.

"Hobart, did you do this?" The fat boy backed off quietly and clung to his mother; but he did not answer.

"Hobart, did you start this?"

Still no answer.

"Harry, this was you; you started it. Didn't you try to hurt Hobart?"

I nodded.

My mother took me by the hand and drew me away.

"He is a rascal, Mrs. Fenton, and has a temper like sin; but he will tell the truth, thank goodness."

I am telling this not for the mere relation, but by the way of introduction. It was my first meeting with Hobart Fenton. It is necessary that you know us both and our characters. Our lives are so entwined and so related that without it you could not get the gist of the story. In the afternoon I came across the street to play with Hobart. He met me smiling. It was not in his healthy little soul to hold resentment. I was either all smiles or anger. I forgot as quickly as I battled. That night there were two happy youngsters tucked into the bed and covers.

SO WE grew up; one with the other. We played as children do and fought as boys have done from the beginning. I shall say right now that the fights were mostly my fault. I started them one and all; and if every battle had the same beginning it likewise had the same ending. That first fight was but the forerunner of all the others. Though we have always been chums we have always been willing to battle. The boys would place a chip upon his shoulder to see me start it. He has always outweighed me. I have knocked off a thousand chips and have taken a thousand beatings. I have still one more coming. I would knock a chip off Hobart Fenton's shoulder if he weighed a ton.

Please do not think hard of Hobart. He is the kindest soul in the world; there never was a truer lad nor a kinder heart. He loved me from the beginning. He was strong, healthy, fat, and, like fat boys, forever laughing. He followed me into

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trouble and when I was retreating he valiantly defended the rear. Stronger, sturdier, and slower, he has been a sort of protector from the beginning. I have called him the Rear Guard; and he does not resent it.

I have always been in mischief, restless, and eager for anything that would bring quick action; and when I got into deep water Hobart would come along, pluck me out and pull me to shore and safety. Did you ever see a great mastiff and a fox terrier running together? It is a homely illustration; but an apt one.

We were boys together, with our delights and troubles, joys and sorrows. I thought so much of Hobart that I did not shirk stooping to help him take care of his baby sister. That is about the supreme sacrifice of a boy's devotion. In after years, of course, he has laughed at me and swears I did it on purpose. I do not know, but I am willing to admit that I think a whole lot of that sister.

Side by side we grew up and into manhood. We went to school and into college. In our prep days we began playing football. Even in the beginning he was sturdy, strong and surtopped all the fellows. I was wiry, alert, full of action and small. We were kept together, he at center, and I at quarter. There was a force between us that was higher than all training, an intuition, a strength and confidence that reached out of the cradle.

I knew his actions, every move and quiver; when I took the ball there was no danger of the play being blocked. He was in front of me fighting to shield me and to give me a chance for action. Together, at least, so spoke the critics, we were a great pair. We were never separated but once. That was in college; it was the only time I had doubts of my ability as a player. Robbing me of that broad back was like stealing my instinct. We had grown double. For all of my training and experience I could not function; my football wits were foggy, I lost all the snap of action. It was so with Hobart. He was slow and bewildered; he lost all the zest and force that made him a great center. The coaches perceived it immediately. Thereafter we were never used in a game unless they could keep us together.

And now just a bit more. Even as we were at odds in our physical builds and our dispositions, so were we in our studies. From the beginning Hobart has had a mania for screws, bolts, nuts, and pistons. He is practical: he likes mathematics; he can talk you from the binomial theorem up into Calculus; he is never so happy as when the air is buzzing with a conversation charged with induction coils, alternating currents, or atomic energy. The whole swing and force of popular science is his kingdom. I will say for Hobart that he is just about in line to be king of it all. Today he is in South America, one of our greatest engineers. He is bringing the water down from the Andes; and it is just about like those strong shoulders and that good head to restore the land of the Incas.

About myself? I went into the law. I enjoy an atmosphere of strife and contention. I might have made a good soldier; but as there was no prospect of immediate war I was content with strife forensic. I liked books and discussion and I thought that I would like the law. On the advice of my elders I took up an A. B. course and then entered the law college, and in due time was admitted to practice. It was while pursuing this letters course that I first ran into philosophy. I was a lad to enjoy quick, pithy, epigrammatic statements. I have always favored a man who hits from the shoulder. Professor Holcomb was of terse, heavy thinking; he spoke what he thought and he did not quibble. He favored no one.

FRANKLY speaking, I will say that the old white-haired professor left his stamp upon me. He was one of the kind whose characters influence generations. I loved him like all the rest; though I was not above playing a trick on the old fellow occasionally. Still he had a wit of his own and seldom came out second best, and

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when he lost out he could laugh like the next one. I was deeply impressed by the doctor. As I took course after course under him I was convinced that for all of his dry philosophy the old fellow had a trick up his sleeve; he had a way of expounding that was rather startling; likewise, he had a scarcely concealed contempt for some of the demigods of our old philosophy.

What this trick was I could never uncover. I hung on and dug into great tomes of wisdom. I became interested and gradually took up with his speculation; for all of my love of action I found that I had a strong subcurrent for the philosophical.

Now I roomed with Hobart. When I would come home with some dry tome and would lose myself in it by the hour he could not understand it. I was preparing for the law. He could see no advantage to be derived from this digging into speculation. He was practical and unless he could drive a nail into a thing or at least dig into its chemical elements it was hard to get him interested.

"Of what use is it, Harry? Why waste your brains? These old fogies have been pounding on the question for three thousand years. What have they got? You could read all their literature from the pyramids down to the present skyscrapers and you wouldn't get enough practical wisdom to drive a dump-cart."

"That's just it," I answered. "I'm not hankering for a dump-cart. You have an idea that all the wisdom in the world is locked up in the concrete; unless a thing has wheels, pistons, some sort of combustion, or a chemical action you are not interested. What gives you the control over your machinery? Brains! But what makes the mind go?"

Hobart blinked.

"Fine," he answered. "Go on."

"Well," I answered, "that's what I am after."

He laughed.

"Great. Well, keep at it. It's your funeral, Harry. When you have found it let me know and I'll beat you to the patent."

With that he turned to his desk and dug into one of his everlasting formulas. Just the same, next day when I entered Holcomb's lecture-room I was in for a surprise. My husky roommate was in the seat beside me.

"What's the big idea?" I asked.

"Big idea is right, Harry," be grinned. "Just thought I would beat you to it. Had a dickens of a time with Dan Clark, of the engineering department. Told him I wanted to study philosophy. The old boy put up a beautiful holler. Couldn't understand what an engineer would want with psychology or Ethics 2b. Neither could I until I got to thinking last night when I went to roost. Because a thing has never been done is no reason why it never will be; is it, Harry?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Certainly not. I don't know just what you are driving at. Perhaps you intend to take your notes over to the machine shop and hammer out the Secret of the Absolute."

He grinned.

"Pretty wise head at that, Harry. What did you call it? The Secret of the Absolute. Will remember that. I'm not much on phrases; but I am sure of the strong boy with the hammer. You don't object to my sitting here beside you; so that I, too, may drink in the little drops of wisdom?"

It was in this way that Hobart entered into the study of philosophy. When the class was over and we were going down the steps he patted me on the shoulder.

"Not so bad, Harry. Not so bad. The old doctor is there; he's got them going. Likewise little Hobart has got a big idea."

Now it happened that this was just about six weeks before Dr. Holcomb announced his great lecture on the Blind Spot. It was not more than a week after registration. In the time ensuing Fenton became just as great an enthusiast as myself. His idea, of course, was chimerical and a blind; his main purpose was to get in with me where he could argue me out

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of my folly. He wound up by being a convert of the professor.

Then came the great day. The night of the announcement we had a long discussion. It was a deep question. For all of my faith in the professor I was hardly prepared for a thing like this. Strange to say I was the skeptic; and stranger still, it was Hobart who took the side of the doctor.

"Why not?" he said. "It merely comes down to this: you grant that a thing is possible and then you deny the possibility of a proof — outside of your abstract. That's good paradox, Harry; but almighty poor logic. If it is so it certainly can be proven. There's not one reason in the world why we can't have something concrete. The professor is right. I am with him. He's the only professor in all the ages."

Well, it turned out as it did. It was a terrible blow to us all. Most of the world took it as a great murder or an equally great case of abduction. There were but few, even on the campus, who embraced the side of the doctor. It was a case of villainy, of a couple of remarkably clever rogues and a trusting scholar.

But there was one whose faith was not diminished. He had been one of the last to come under the influence of the doctor. He was practical and concrete, and not at all attuned to philosophy; he had not the training for deep dry thinking. He would not recede one whit. One day I caught him sitting down with his head between his hands. I touched him on the shoulder.

"What's the deep study, pal?" I asked him.

He looked up. By his eyes I could see that his thoughts had been far away.

"What's the deep study?" I repeated.

"I was just thinking, Harry; just thinking."

"What?"

"I was just thinking, Harry, that I would like to have about one hundred thousand dollars and about ten years leisure."

"That's a nice thought," I answered; "I could think that myself. What would you do with it?"

"Do? Why, there is just one thing that I would do if I had that much money. I would solve the Blind Spot."

THIS happened years ago while we were still in college. Many things have occurred since then. I am writing this on the verge of disaster. How little do we know! What was the idea that buzzed in the head of Hobart Fenton? He is concrete, physical, fearless. He is in South America. I have cabled to him and expect him as fast as steam can bring him. The great idea and discovery of the professor is a fact, not fiction. What is it? That I cannot answer. I have found it and I am a witness to its potency.

Some law that has been missed through the ages; phenomena that should not have been discovered. It is inexorable and insidious; it is concrete. Out of the unknown comes terror. Through the love for the great professor I have pitted myself against it. From the beginning it has been almost hopeless. I remember that last digression in ethics. "The mystery of the occult may be solved. We are five-sensed. When we bring the thing down to the concrete we may understand."

Sometimes I wonder at the Rhamda. Is he a man or a fantom? Does he control the Blind Spot? Is he the substance and the proof that was promised by Dr. Holcomb? Through what process and what laws did the professor acquire even his partial control over the phenomena? Where did the Rhamda and his beautiful companion come from? Who are they? And lastly — what was the idea that buzzed in the head of Hobart Fenton?

When I look back now I wonder. I have never believed in fate. I do not believe in it now. Man is the master of his own destiny. We are cowards else. I lay my all on honor. Whatever is to be known we should know it. One's duty is ever to one's fellows. Heads up and onward. I am not a brave man, perhaps, under close analysis; but once I have given my word

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I shall keep it. I have done my bit; my simple duty. Perhaps I have failed. In holding myself against the Blind Spot I have done no more than would have been done by a million others. I have only one regret. Failure is seldom rewarded. I had hoped that my life would be the last; I have a dim hope still. If I fail in the end, there must be still one more to follow.

Understand. I do not expect to die. It is the unknown that I am afraid of. I who thought that we knew so much have found it still so little. There are so many laws in the weave of Cosmos that are still unguessed. What is this death that we are afraid of? What is life? Can we solve it? Is it permissible? What is the Blind Spot? If Hobart Fenton is right it has nothing to do with death. If so, what is it?

My pen is weak. I am weary. I am waiting for Hobart. Perhaps I shall not last. When he comes I want him to know my story. What he knows already will not hurt repeating. It is well that man shall have it; it may be that we shall both fail — there is no telling; but if we do the world can profit by our blunders and guide itself — perhaps to the mastery of the phenomena that controls the Blind Spot.

I ask you to bear with me. If I make a few mistakes or I am a bit loose, remember the stress under which I am writing. I shall try to be plain so that all may follow.

CHAPTER VI

CHICK WATSON

NOW to go back.

In due time we were both of us graduated from college. I went into the law and Hobart into engineering. We were both successful. There was not a thing to foreshadow that either of us was to be jerked from his profession. There was no adventure, but lots of work and the plentiful reward of proportion.

Perhaps I was a bit more fortunate. I was a lover and Hobart was still a confirmed bachelor. It was a subject over which he was never done joshing. It was not my fault. I was innocent. If the blame ran anywhere it would have to be placed upon that baby sister. We had wheeled her on the sidewalks; watched her toddle in her first footsteps; and to keep her from crying had missed many a game of marbles. Seriously, at the time I do not think I had any thought of the future. When she had grown into an awkward bundle of arms and legs and pigtails I would have run away at the suggestion. That is just it.

It happened as it has happened since God first made the maiden. One fall Hobart and I started off for college. We left Charlotte at the gate a girl of fifteen years and ten times as many angles. I pulled one of her pigtails, kissed her, and told her I wanted her to get pretty. When we came home next summer I went over to pull the other pigtail. I did not pull it. I was met by the fairest little lady I had ever looked on. And I could not kiss her. Seriously, was I to blame?

Now to the incident.

It was a night in September. Hobart had completed the details of his affairs and had booked passage to South America. He was to sail next morning. We had dinner that day with his family, and then came up to San Francisco for a last and farewell bachelor night. We could take in the opera together, have supper at our favorite café, and then turn in. It was a long hark back to our childhood; but for all that we were still boys together.

I remember that night. It was our favorite opera — "Faust." It was the one piece that we could agree on. Looking back since, I have wondered at the coincidence. The old myth age to youth and the subcurrent sin with its stalking, laughing, subtle Mephistopheles. Even the introductory Faust — the octogenarian, scholar — the Mephisto, the element of the supernatural — all have woven into color. It is strange that we should have taken in this one opera on this one evening. I recall our coming out of the build-

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ing; our minds thrilling to the music and the subtle weirdness of a master.

A fog had fallen — one of those thick, heavy, gray mists that sometimes come upon us in September. Into its somber depths the crowd disappeared like shadows. The lights upon the streets blurred yellow. At the cold sheer contact we hesitated upon the sidewalk.

I had on a light overcoat. Hobart, bound for the tropics, had no such protection. It was cold and miserable, a chill wind stirring from the north was unusually cutting. Hobart raised his collar and dug his hands into his pockets.

"Brr," he muttered; "brr, some coffee or some wine! Something."

The sidewalks were wet and slippery, the mists settling under the lights had the effect of drizzle. I touched Hobart's arm and we started across the street.

"Brr is right," I answered, "and some wine. Brr. Notice the shadows, like ghosts."

We were half across the street before he answered; then he stopped.

"Ghosts! Did you say ghosts, Harry?" I noted a strange inflection in his voice. He stood still and peered into the fog bank. His stop was sudden and suggestive. Just then a passing taxicab almost caught us and we were compelled to dodge quickly. Hobart ducked out of the way and I side-stepped in another direction. We came up together on the sidewalk. Again he peered into the shadow.

"Confound that cab," he was saying, "now we've missed him."

He took off his hat and then put it back on his head. It was his favorite trick when bewildered. I looked up and down the street.

"Didn't you see him? Harry! Didn't you see him? It was Rhamda Avec!"

I had seen no one: that is to notice; I did not know the Rhamda. Neither did he.

"The Rhamda? You don't know him." Hobart was puzzled.

"No," he said; "I do not: but it was he, just as sure as I am a fat man."

I whistled. I recalled the tale that was now a legend. The man had an affinity for the fog mist. To come out of "Faust" and to run into the Rhamda! What was the connection? For a moment we both stood still and waited.

"I wonder — " said Hobart. "I was just thinking about that fellow to-night. Strange! Well, let's get something hot — some coffee."

But it had given us something for discussion. Certainly it was unusual. During the past few days I had been thinking of Dr. Holcomb; and for the last few hours the tale had clung with reiterating persistence. Perhaps it was the weirdness and the tremulous intoxication of the music. I was one of the vast majority who disbelieved it. Was it possible that it was, after all, other than the film of fancy? There are times when we are receptive; at that moment I could have believed it.

WE ENTERED the café and chose a table slightly to the rear. It was a contrast to the cold outside; the lights so bright, the glasses clinking, laughter and music. A few young people were dancing. I sat down; in a moment the lightness and jollity had stirred my blood. Hobart took a chair opposite. The place was full of beauty. With the thrill of youth I noted the marvelous array of girls and women. In the back of my mind blurred the image of the Rhamda. I had never seen him; but I had read the description. I wondered absently at the persistence. I recall Hobart's reiteration.

"On my honor as a fat man."

I have said that I do not believe in fate. I repeat it. Man should control his own destiny. A great man does. Perhaps that is it. I am not great. Certainly it was circumstance.

In the back part of the room at one of the tables was a young man sitting alone. Something caught my attention. Perhaps it was his listlessness or the dreamy unconcern with which he watched the dancers; or it may have been the utter forlornness of his expression. I noted his unusual

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pallor and his cast of dissipation, also the continual working of his long, lean fingers. There are certain set fixtures in the night life of any city. But this was not one. He was not an habitué. From the first I sensed it. There was a certain greatness to his loneliness and his isolation. I wondered.

Just then he looked up. By a mere coincidence our eyes met. He smiled, a weak smile and a forlorn one, and it seemed to me rather pitiful. Then as suddenly his glance wandered to the door behind me. Perhaps there was something in my expression that caught Hobart's attention. He turned about.

"Say, Harry, who is that fellow? I know that face, I'm certain."

"Come to think, I have seen him myself. I wonder—"

The young man looked up again. The same weary smile. He nodded. And again he glanced over my shoulder toward the door. His face suddenly hardened.

"He knows us at any rate," I ventured.

Now Hobart was sitting with his face toward the entrance. He could see any one coming or going. Following the young man's glance he looked over my shoulder. He suddenly reached over and took me by the forearm.

"Don't look around," he warned; "take it easy. As I said — on my honor as a fat man."

The very words foretold. I could not but risk a glance: Across the room a man was coming down the aisle — a tall man, dark, and of a very decided manner. I had read his description many times; I had seen his likeness as drawn by certain sketch artists of the city. They did not do him justice. He had a wonderful way and presence — you might say, magnetism. I noticed the furtive wandering glances that were cast, especially by the women. He was a handsome man beyond denying, about the handsomest I had ever seen. The same elusiveness.

At first I would have sworn him to be of sixty; the next minute I was just as certain of his youth. There was something about him that could not be put to paper, be it strength, force or vitality; he was subtle. His step was prim and distinctive, light as shadow; in one hand he carried the red case that was so often mentioned. I breathed an exclamation.

Hobart nodded.

"Am I a fat man? The famous Rhamda! What say? Ah, ha! he has business with our wan friend yonder. See! I would give just about three pfennigs to get the trend of their discourse."

And it was so. He took a chair opposite the wan one. The young man straightened. His face was even more familiar; but I could not place him. His lips were set; in their grim line — determination; whatever his exhaustion there was still a will. Somehow one had a respect for this weak one; he was not a mere weakling. Yet I was not so sure that he was not afraid of the Rhamda. He spoke to the waiter. The

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Rhamda began talking. I noted the poise in his maner; it was not evil, rather was it calm — and calculating. He made an indication. The young man drew back. He smiled; it was feeble and weary, but for all that disdainful. Though one had a pity for his forlornness, there was still an admiration.

The waiter brought glasses.

The young man swallowed his vintage at a gulp, the other picked his up and sipped it. Again he made the indication. The youth dropped his hand upon the table, a pale blue light followed the movement of his fingers. The older man pointed. So that was their contention? A jewel? After all our fantom was material enough to desire possession; his solicitude was calmness; but for all that aggression. I could sense a battle; but the young man turned the jewel to the palm side of his fingers; he shook his head.

The Rhamda drew up. For a moment he waited. Was it for surrender? Once he started to speak, but was cut short by the other. For all of his weakness there was spirit to the young man. He even laughed. The Rhamda drew out a watch. He held up two fingers. I heard Hobart mumble.

"Two minutes. Well, I'm betting on the young one. Too much soul. He's not dead; just weary."

HE WAS right. At exactly one hundred and twenty seconds the Rhamda closed his watch. He spoke something. Again the young man laughed. He lit a cigarette; from the flicker and jerk of the flame he was trembling. But he was still emphatic. The other arose from the table, walked down the aisle and out of the building. The youth spread out both arms and dropped his head upon the table.

It was a little drama enacted almost in silence. Hobart and I exchanged glances. The mere glimpse of the Rhamda had brought us both back to the Blind Spot. Was there any connection? Who was the young man with life sapped out? I had a flitting recollection of a face strangely familiar. Hobart interrupted my thoughts.

"I'd give just about one leg for the gist of that conversation. That was the Rhamda; but who is the other ghost?"

"Do you think it has to do with the Blind Spot?"

"I don't think," averred Hobart. "I know. Wonder what's the time." He glanced at his watch. "Eleven thirty."

Just here the young man at the table raised up his head. The cigarette was still between his fingers; he puffed lamely for a minute, taking a dull note of his surroundings. In the well of gaiety and laughter coming from all parts of the room his actions were out of place. He seemed dazed; unable to pull himself together. Suddenly he looked at us. He started.

"He certainly knows us," I said. "I wonder — by George, he's coming over."

Even his step was feeble. There was exertion about every move of his body, the wanness and effort of gone vitality; he balanced himself carefully. Slowly, slowly, line by line his features became familiar, the underlines of another, the ghost of one departed. At first I could not place him. He held himself up for breath. Who was he? Then it suddenly came to me — back to the old days at college — an athlete, one of the best of fellows, one of the sturdiest of men! He had come to this!

Hobart was before me.

"By all the things that are holy!" he exclaimed. "Chick Watson! Here, have a seat. In the name of Heavens, Chick! What!"

The other dropped feebly into the chair. The body that had once been so powerful was a skeleton. His coat was a disguise of padding.

"Hello, Hobe; hello, Harry," he spoke in a whisper. "Not much like the old Chick, am I? First thing, I'll take some brandy."

It was almost tragic. I glanced at Hobart and nodded to the waiter. Could it be Chick Watson? He had been an athlete; had tipped two hundred pounds and had been a letter man on the varsity. I had seen him a year before, hale,

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healthy, prosperous. And here he was — a wreck!

"No," he muttered, "I'm not sick — not sick. Lord, boys, it's good to meet you. I just thought I would come out for this one last night, hear some music, see a pretty face, perhaps meet a friend. But I am afraid, afraid—" He dropped off like one suddenly drifting into slumber.

"Hustle that waiter," I said to Hobart. "Hurry that brandy."

The stimulant seemed to revive him. He lifted up suddenly. There was fear in his eyes; then on seeing himself among friends — relief. He turned to me.

"Think I'm sick, don't you?" he asked.

"You certainly are," I answered.

"Well, I'm not."

For a moment silence. I glanced at Hobart. Hobart nodded.

"You're just about in line for a doctor, Chick, old boy," I said. "I am going to see that you have one. Bed for you, and the care of mother—"

He started; he seemed to jerk himself together.

"That's it, Harry; that's what I wanted. It's so hard for me to think. Mother, mother! That's why I came down-town. I wanted a friend. I have something for you to give to mother."

"Rats," I said. "I'll take you to her. What are you talking about?"

But he shook his head.

"I wish that you were telling the truth, Harry. But it's no use — not after to-night. All the doctors in the world could not save me. I'm not sick, boys, far from it."

Hobart spoke up.

"What is it, Chick? I have a suspicion. Am I right?"

Chick looked up; he closed his eyes.

"All right, Hobe, what's your suspicion?"

Fenton leaned over. It seemed to me that he was peering into the other's soul. He touched his forearm.

"Chick, old boy, I think I know. But tell me. Am I right? It's the Blind Spot."

At the words Watson opened his eyes; they were full of hope and wonder, for a moment, and then, as suddenly of a great despair. His body went to a heap. His voice was feeble.

"Yes," he answered, "I am dying — of the Blind Spot."

CHAPTER VII

THE RING

IT WAS a terrible thing; death stalking out of the Blind Spot. We had almost forgotten. It had been a story hitherto —a wonderful one to be sure, and one to arouse conjecture. I had never thought that we were to be brought to its shivering contact. It was out of the occult; it had been so pronounced by the professor; a great secret of life holding out a guerdon of death to its votaries. Witness Chick Watson, the type of healthy, fighting manhood —come to this. He opened his eyes feebly; one could see the light; the old spirit was there — fighting for life. What was this struggle of soul and flesh? Why had the soul hung on? He made another effort.

"More drink," he asked; "more drink. Anything to hold me together. I must tell you. You must take my place and — and —fight the Blind Spot!"

"Order the drinks," I told Hobart. "I see Dr. Hansen yonder. Even if we can not save him we must hold him until we get his story."

How well do I remember. What a meaning has that moment! The restaurant was full of people. In the midst of the flow of repartee, while youth danced and music welled, Death was keeping us company. We must arouse no attention. We must save him if possible; but most of all hold him until he had given us what he knew. We would avenge him. What was this Rhamda and his Blind Spot?

The doctor came over.

"A strange case," he murmured. "Pulse normal; not a trace of fever. Not sick, you say—" Hobart pointed to his head. "Ah, I see! Mr. Wendel, I would suggest home and a bed."

Just here Watson opened his eyes again. They rested first upon the doctor, then

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upon myself, and finally upon the brandy. He took it up and drank it with eagerness. It was his third one; it gave him a bit more life.

"Didn't I tell you, boys, that there is not a doctor on earth that can save me? Excuse me, doc. I am not sick. I told them. I am far past physic; I have gone beyond medicine. All I ask is stimulant and life enough to tell my story."

"My boy," asked the doctor kindly, "what ails you?"

Watson smiled. He touched himself on the forehead.

"Up here, doc. There are things in the world with which we may not tamper. I tried it. Somebody had to do it and somebody has to do it yet. You remember Dr. Holcomb; he was a great man; he was after the secret of life. He began it."

Dr. Hansen started.

"Lord!" he exclaimed, looking at us all; "you don't mean this man is mixed up in the Blind Spot?"

We nodded. Watson smiled; again he dropped back into inertia; the speech he had made was his longest yet; the brandy was coming into effect.

"Give him brandy," the doctor said; "it is as good as anything. It will hold him together and give him life for a while. Here." He reached into his pocket and flicked something into the glass. "That will help him. Gentleman, do you know what it means? I had always thought! I knew Dr. Holcomb! Crossing over the border! It may not be done! The secret of life is impossible. Yet—"

Watson opened his eyes again; his spirit seemed to suddenly flicker into defiance.

"Who said it is impossible? Who said it? Gentlemen, it is, too, possible. Dr. Holcomb—pardon me. I do not wish to appear as a sot; but this brandy is about the only thing to hold me together. I have only a few hours left."

He took the glass, and at one gulp downed the contents. I do not know what the doctor had dropped into it. Chick revived suddenly; a strange light blazed up in his eyes, like life rekindled.

"Ah, now I am better. So?"

He turned to us all; then to the doctor.

"So you say the secret of life is impossible?"

"I—"

Chick smiled wanly. "May I ask you: what is it that has just flared up within me? I am weak, anemic, fallen to pieces; my muscles have lost the power to function, my blood runs cold, I have been more than two feet over the border. And yet—a few drinks of brandy, of stimulants, and you have drawn me back, my heart beats strongly, for an hour. By means of drugs you have infused a new life—which of course is the old—and driven the material components of my body into correlation. It is the function of medicine to so dish out and doctor to our bodies; to keep life in us. You are successful for a time; so long as nature is with you; but all the while you are held aghast by the knowledge that the least flaw, the least disarrangement, and you are beaten.

"It is your business to hold this life or what you may. When it has gone your structures, your anatomy, your wonderful human machine is worthless. Where has it come from? Where has it gone? I have drunk four glasses of brandy; I have a lease of four short hours. Ordinarily it would bring reaction; it is poison, to be sure; but it is driving back my spirit, giving me life and strength enough to tell my story—in the morning I shall be no more. By sequence I am a dead man already. Four glasses of brandy; they are speaking. Whence comes this affinity of substance and of shadow?"

We all of us listened, the doctor most of all. "Go on," said the doctor.

"Can't you see?" repeated Watson. "There is affinity between substance and shadow; and therefore your spirit or shadow or what you will is concrete, is in itself a substance. It is material just as much as you are. Because you do not see it is no proof that it is not substance. That pot palm yonder does not see you; it is not blessed with eyes."

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THE DOCTOR looked at Watson; he spoke gently.

"This is very old stuff, my boy, out of our abstract philosophy. No man knows the secret of life. Not even yourself."

The light in Watson's eyes grew brighter, he straightened; he began slipping the ring from his finger.

"No," he answered, "I do not. I have tried and it was like playing with the lightning. I sought for life and it is giving me death. But there is one man living who has found it."

"And this man?"

"Is Dr. Holcomb!"

We all of us started. We had every one given the doctor up as dead. The very presence of Watson was tragedy. We did not doubt that he had been through some terrible experience. There are things in the world that may not be unriddled. Some power, some sinister thing was reaching for his vitality. What did he know about the professor? Dr. Holcomb had been a long time dead.

"Gentlemen. You must hear my story; I have not long to tell it. However, before I start here is a proof for a beginning."

He tossed the ring upon the table.

It was Hobart who picked it up. A beautiful stone, like a sapphire; blue but uncut and of a strange pellucid transparency—a jewel undoubtedly; but of a kind we had never seen. We all of us examined it, and were all, I am afraid, a bit disappointed. It was a stone and nothing else.

Watson watched us. The waiter had brought more brandy, and he was sipping it, not because he liked it, he said, but just to keep himself at the proper lift.

"You do not understand it, eh? You see nothing? Hobart, have you a match? There, that's it; now give me the ring. See—" He struck the match and held the flame against the jewel. "Gentlemen, there is no need for me to speak. The stone will give you a volume. It's not trickery, I assure you, but fact. There, now, perfect. Doctor, you are the skeptic. Take a look at the stone."

The doctor picked it up casually and held it up before his eyes. At first he frowned; then a look of incredulity; his chin dropped and he rose in his chair.

"My God," he exclaimed, "the man's living! It—he—"

But Hobart and I had crowded over. The doctor held the ring so we could see it. Inside the stone was Dr. Holcomb!

It was a strenuous moment, and the most incredible. We all of us knew the doctor. It was not a photograph, nor a likeness; but the man himself. It was beyond all reason that he could be in the jewel; indeed there was only the head visible; one could catch the expression of life, the movements of the eyelids. It was natural and life. Yet how could it be? What was it? It was Hobart who spoke first.

"Chick," he asked, "what's the meaning? Were it not for my own eyes I would call it impossible. It is absurd on the face. The doctor! Yet I can see him—living. Where is he?"

Chick nodded.

"That's the whole question. Where is he? I know and yet I know nothing. You are now looking into the Blind Spot. The doctor sought the secret of life—and found it. He was trapped by his own wisdom!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE NERVINA

FOR a moment we were silent. The jewel reposed upon the table. What was the secret of its phenomena? I could think of nothing in science that would explain it. It was a kind I had never seen. How had Watson come into its possession? What was the tale he had to tell? The lean, long figure that clutched for brandy! What force was this that had driven him to such a verge? He was resigned; though he was defiant he had already conceded his surrender. I had known him a year before, hale, happy, joyous, and successful. The whole thing was hidden. Was it Rhamda Avec? Dr. Hansen spoke.

"Watson," he asked, "what do you know about the Blind Spot?"

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"Nothing."

We all turned to Chick. Hobart ordered more brandy. The doctor's eyes went to slits. I could not but wonder. The man had told us but a moment before that he was dying of the Blind Spot. Yet he knew nothing! I had to speak.

"Chick," I asked, "who is Rhamda Avec?"

Watson turned.

"You saw him a few minutes ago? You saw him with me? Let me ask you."

"Yes," I answered, "I saw him. Most everybody did. Is he invisible? Is he really the fantom they say?"

Somehow the mention of the name made him nervous; he looked cautiously about the room.

"That I don't know, Harry. It— If I can only get my wits together. Is he a fantom? Yes, I think so. I can't understand him. At least, he has the powers we attribute to an apparition. He is strange and unaccountable. Sometimes you see him, sometimes you don't. He was mixed up, you remember, with Professor Holcomb. The first known of him was on the day the doctor was to deliver his lecture on the Blind Spot. He was tracked, you know, to the very act. Then came in the Nervina."

"And who is the Nervina?"

Watson looked at me blankly.

"The Nervina?" he asked. "The Nervina—what do you know about the Nervina?"

"Nothing. You just now mentioned her."

His mind seemed to ramble. He looked about the room rather fearfully. Perhaps he was afraid.

"Did I mention her? I don't know, Harry, my wits are muddled. The Nervina? She is a goddess. Never was and never will be woman. She loves; she never hates, and still again she does not love. She is beautiful; too beautiful for man. I have quit trying."

"Is she Rhamda's wife?"

His eyes lit fire.

"No!"

"Do you love her?"

He went blank again; but at last he spoke slowly.

"No, I do not love her. What's the use? She is not for me. I did; but I learned better. I was after the professor—and the Blind Spot. She—"

Again that look of haunted pursuit. He glanced about the room. Whatever had been his experience, it was plain that he had not given up. He held something and he held it still. What was it?

"You say you didn't find the Blind Spot?"

"No, I did not find it."

"Have you any idea?"

"My dear Harry," he answered, "I am full of ideas. That's the trouble. I am near it. It is the cause of my present condition. I don't know just what it is nor where. A condition, or a combination of phenomena. You remember the lecture that was never delivered? Had the doctor spoken that morning the world would have had a great fact. He had made a great discovery. It is a terrible thing." He turned the ring so we could all see it—beyond all doubt it was the doctor. "There he is—the professor. If he could only speak. The secret of the ages. Just think what it means. Where is he? I have taken that jewel to the greatest lapidaries and they have one and all been startled. Then they all come to the same conclusion—trickery—Chinese or Hindu work, they say; most of them want to cut."

"Have you taken it to the police?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I would simply be laughed at."

"Have you ever reported this Rhamda?"

"A score of times. They have come and sought; but every time he has gone out—like a shadow. It's got to be an old story now. If you call them up and tell them they laugh."

"How do you account for it?"

"I don't. I—I—I'm just dying."

"And not one member of the force—surely?"

"Oh, yes. There's one. You have heard of Jerome. He was the ferry detective.

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Perhaps you have read of it in the supplements. It's a bit melodramatic; but still follows the facts fairly well. Jerome followed the professor and the Rhamda to the house of the Blind Spot, as he calls it. He's not a man to fool. He had eyes and he saw it. He will not leave it till he's dead."

"But he did not see the Blind Spot, did he? How about trickery? Did it ever occur to you that the professor might have been murdered?"

WATSON reached over and turned up the jewel.

"Take a look at that, Harry. Does that look like murder? When you see the man living?"

Here Hobart came in.

"Just a minute, Chick. My wise friend here is an attorney. He's always the first into everything, especially conversation. It's been my job pulling Harry out of trouble. Just one question."

"All right."

"Didn't you—er—keep company, as they say, with Bertha Holcomb while at college?"

A kind look came into the man's eyes; he nodded; his whole face was soft and saddened.

"I see. That naturally brought you to the Blind Spot. You are after her father. Am I correct?"

"Exactly."

"All right. Perhaps Bertha has taken you into some of her father's secrets. He undoubtedly had data on this Blind Spot. Have you ever been able to locate it?"

"No!"

"I see. This Rhamda? Has he ever sought that data?"

"Many, many times."

"Does he know you haven't it?"

"No."

"So. I understand. You hold the whip hand through your ignorance. Rhamda is your villain—and perhaps this Nervina? Who is she?"

"A goddess."

Hobart smiled.

"Oh, yes!" He laughed. "A goddess. Naturally! They all are. There are about forty in this room at the present moment. Watch them dance!"

Now I had picked up the ring. It just fitted the natural finger. I tried it on and looked into the jewel. The professor was growing dimmer. The marvelous blue was returning, a hue of fascination, not the hot flash of the diamond; but the frozen light of the iceberg. It was frigid, cold, terrible, blue, alluring. To me at the moment it seemed alive and pulselike. I could not account for it. I felt the lust for possession. Perhaps there was something in my face. Watson leaned over and touched me on the arm.

"Harry," he asked, "do you think you can stand up under the burden? Will you take my place?"

I looked into his eyes; in their black depths was almost entreaty. How haunting they were; and beseeching.

"Will you take my place?" he begged. "Are you willing to give up all that God gives to the fortunate? Will you give up your practice? Will you hold out to the end? Never surrender? Will—"

"You mean will I take this ring?"

He nodded.

"Exactly. But you must know beforehand. It would be murder to give it to you without the warning. Either your death or that of Dr. Holcomb. It is not a simple jewel. It defies description. It takes a man to wear it. It is subtle and of destruction; it eats like a canker; it destroys the body; it frightens the soul—"

"An ominous piece of finery," I spoke. "Wherein—"

But Watson interrupted. There was appeal in his eyes.

"Harry," he went on, "I am asking. Somebody has got to wear this ring. He must be a man. He must be fearless; he must taunt the devil. It is hard work, I assure you. I cannot last much longer. You loved the old doctor. If we get at this law we have done more for mankind than either of us may do with his profession. We must save the old professor.

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He is living and he is waiting. There are perils and forces that we do not know of. The doctor went at it alone and fearless; he succumbed to his own wisdom. I have followed after, and I have been crushed down—perhaps by my ignorance. I am not afraid. But I do not want my work to die. Somebody has got to take it and you are the man."

They were all of them looking at me. I studied the wonderful blue and its light. The image of the great professor had dimmed almost completely. It was a sudden task and a great one. Here was a law; one of the great secrets of Cosmos. What was it? Somehow the lure caught into my vitals. I was not afraid; perhaps because I had too much health. I could not picture myself ever coming to the extremity of my companion. Besides, it was a duty. I owed it to the old doctor. It seemed somehow that he was speaking. Though Watson did the talking I could feel him calling. Would I be afraid? Besides, there was the jewel. It was calling; already I could feel it burning into my spirit. I looked up.

"Do you take it, Harry?"

I nodded.

"I do. God knows I am worthless enough. I'll take it up. It may perchance give me a chance to tangle with this famous Rhamda."

"Be careful of this Rhamda, Harry. And above all do not let him have the ring."

"Why?"

"Because. Now listen. I am not saying this absolutely, understand. Nevertheless the facts all point in one direction. Hold the ring. Somewhere in that great luster lies a great secret; it controls the Blind Spot. The Rhamda himself may not take it off your finger. You are immune from violence. Only the ring itself may kill you."

He coughed.

"God knows," he spoke, "it has killed me."

It was rather ominous. The mere fact of that cough and his weakness was enough. One would come to this. He had warned me, and he had sought me with the same voice as the warning.

"But what is the Blind Spot?"

"Then you take the ring? What is the time? Twelve. Gentlemen—"

Now here comes in one of the strange parts of my story—one that I cannot account for. Over the shoulder of Dr. Hansen I could watch the door. Whether it was the ring or not I do not know. At the time I did not reason. I acted upon impulse. It was an act beyond good breeding. I had never done such a thing before. I had never even seen the woman.

The woman? Why do I say it? She was never a woman—she was a girl—far, far transcendent. It was the first time I had ever seen her—standing there before the door. I had never beheld such beauty, such profile, poise—the witching, laughing, night black of her eyes; the perfectly bridged nose and the red, red lips that

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smiled, it seemed to me, in sadness. She hesitated, and as if puzzled, lifted a jeweled hand to her raven mass of hair. To this minute I cannot account for my action, unless, perchance, it was the ring. Perhaps it was. Anyway, I had risen.

How well do I remember.

It seemed to me that I had known her a long, long time. There was something about her that was not seduction; but far, far above it. Some place I had seen her, had known her. She was looking and she was waiting for me. There was something about her that was super feminine. I thought it then, and I say it now.

Just then her glance came my way. She smiled, and nodded; there was a note of sadness in her voice.

"Harry Wendel!"

There is no accounting for my action, nor my wonder; she knew me. Then it was true! I was not mistaken! Some place I had seen her. I felt a vague and dim rush of dreamy recollections. Ah, that was the answer! She was a girl of dreams and fantoms. Illusive as beauty; as tender as love and with the freshness of a fairy. Even then I knew it; she was not a woman; not as we conceive her; she was some materialization out of Heaven. Why do I talk so? This strange beauty that is woman! From the very first she held me in a thrall that has no explanation.

"Do we dance?" she asked simply.

THE NEXT moment I had her in my arms and we were out among the dancers. That my actions were queer and entirely out of reason never came to me. There was a call about her beautiful body and in her eyes that I could not answer. There was a fact between us, some strange bond that was beyond even passion. She was lithe as a fairy, like the air; she was subtle. I danced, and in an extreme emotion of happiness. A girl out of the dreams and the ether—a sprig of life woven out of the moonbeams!

"Do you know me?" she asked as we danced.

"Yes," I answered, "and no. I have seen you; but I do not remember; you come from the sunshine."

She laughed prettily.

"Do you always talk like this?"

"When I dance with the fairies."

"Perhaps I am not a fairy."

"You are out of my dreams," I answered; "it is sufficient. But who are you?"

She held back her pretty head and looked at me; her lips drooped slightly at the corners, a sad smile, and tender, in the soft wonderful depths of her eyes—a pity.

"Harry," she asked, "are you going to wear this ring?"

So that was it. The ring and the maiden. What was the bond? There was weirdness in its color, almost cabalistic—a call out of the occult. The strange beauty of the girl, her remarkable presence, and her concern. Whoever and whatever she was her anxiety was not personal. In some way she was woven up with this ring and poor Watson.

"I think I shall," I answered.

Again the strange querulous pity, and hesitation; her eyes grew darker, almost pleading.

"You won't give it to me?"

How near I came to doing it I shall not tell. It would be hard to say it. I knew vaguely that she was playing; that I was the plaything. It is hard for a man to think of himself as being toyed with. From the very first she was a thing of spirit, clothed in the flesh and alluring. She was certain; she was confident of my weakness. It was resentment, perhaps, and pride of self that gave the answer.

"I think I shall keep it."

"Do you know the danger, Harry? It is death to wear it. A thousand perils—"

"Then I shall keep it. I like peril. You wish the ring. If I keep it I may have you. This is the first time I have danced with the girl out of the moonbeams."

Her eyes snapped, and she stopped dancing. I do not think my words displeased her. She was still a woman.

"Is this final? You are a fine young

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man, Mr. Wendel. I know you. I stepped in to save you. You are playing with something stranger than the moonbeams. No man may wear that ring and hold to life. Again, Harry, I ask you; for your own sake."

At this moment we passed Watson. He was watching; as our eyes glanced he shook his head. Who was this girl? She was as beautiful as sin and as tender as a virgin. What interest had she in myself?

"That's just the reason," I laughed. "You are too interested. You are too beautiful to wear it. I am a man; I revel in trouble; you are a girl. It would not be honorable to allow you to take it. I shall keep it."

She had overreached herself, and she knew it. She bit her lip. But she took it gracefully; so much so, in fact, that I thought she meant it.

"I am sorry," she answered slowly. "I had hopes. It is terrible to look at Watson and then to think of you. It is, really"—a faint tremor ran through her body; her hand trembled—"it is terrible. You young men are so unafraid. It is too bad."

Just then the door was opened; outside I could see the bank of fog; someone passed. She turned a bit pale.

"Excuse me. I must be going. Oh, Harry, don't you see I'm sorry—"

She held out her hand—the same sad little smile. On the impulse of the moment, unmindful of place, I drew it to my lips and kissed it. She was gone.

I returned to the table. The three men were watching me: Watson analytically, the doctor with wonder, and Hobart with plain disgust. Hobart spoke first.

"Nice for sister Charlotte, eh, Harry? This is our last bachelor night, all right!"

His contemptuous eyes took measure from tip to tip of my body.

I had not a word to say. In the full rush of the moment I knew that he was right. It was all out of reason. I had no excuse outside of sheer insanity—and dishonor. The doctor said nothing. It was only in Watson's face that there was a bit of understanding.

"Hobart," he said, "I have told you. It is not Harry's fault. It is the Nervina. No man may resist her. She is beauty incarnate; she weaves with the hearts of men, and she loves no one. It is the ring. She, the Rhamda, the Blind Spot, and the ring. I have never been able to unravel them. Please do not blame Harry. He went to her even as I. She has but to beckon. But he kept the ring. I watched them. This is but the beginning."

But Hobart muttered: "She's a beauty all right—a beauty. That's the rub. I know Harry—I know him as a brother, and I want him so in fact. But I'd hate to trust that woman."

Watson smiled.

"Never fear, Hobart, your sister is safe enough. The Nervina is not a woman. She is not of the flesh."

"Brrr," said the doctor, "you give me the creeps."

Watson reached for the brandy; he nodded to the doctor.

"Just a bit more of that stuff if you please. It is stimulating, it gives me life. Whatever it is, on the last night one has no fear of habit. There— Now, gentlemen, if you will come with me, I shall take you to the house of the Blind Spot."

CHAPTER IX

"NOW THERE ARE THREE"

I SHALL never forget that night. When we stepped to the sidewalk the whole world was shrouded. The heavy fog clung like depression; life was gone out—a foreboding of gloom and disaster. It was cold, dank, miserable; one shuddered instinctively and battered against the wall with steaming columns of breath. Just outside the door we were detained.

"Dr. Hansen?"

Some one stepped beside us.

"Dr. Hansen?"

"Yes, sir."

"A message, sir."

The doctor made a gesture of impatience.

"Bother!" he spoke. "Bother! A mes-

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sage. Nothing in the world would stop me! I cannot leave."

Nevertheless he stepped back into the light.

"Just a minute, gentlemen."

He tore open the envelope. Then he looked up at the messenger and then at us. His face was startled—almost frightened.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am sorry. Not a thing in the world would detain me but this. I would go with you, but I may not. My duty as a physician. I had hopes." He came over to me and spoke softly. "I am going to send you one of the greatest specialists in the city in my stead. This young man should have attention. It were a crime else. Have you the address?"

"288 Chatterton," I answered.

"Very well, I am sorry, very much disappointed. However, it is my daughter, and I cannot do otherwise. Continue the brandy for a while—and this." He slipped an envelope into my hand. "By that time Dr. Higgins will be with you."

"You think there is hope?" I asked.

"There is always hope," replied the doctor.

I returned to my companions. They were walking slowly. It was work for poor Watson. He dragged on, leaning on Hobart's arm. But at last he gave up.

"Boys," he spoke, "I can't make it. I'm too far gone. I had thought—Oh, what a lapse it has been! I am eighty years of age; one year ago I was a boy. If I only had some more brandy. I have some at the house. We must make that. I must show you; there I can give you the details."

"Hail a cab," I said. "Here's one now."

A few minutes later we were before the House of the Blind Spot. It was a two-story drab affair, much like a thousand others, old-fashioned, and might have been built in the early nineties. It had been outside of the fire limits of 1906, and so had survived the great disaster. Chatterton is a short street running lengthwise along the summit of the hill. A flight of stone steps decended to the sidewalk.

Watson straightened up with an effort.

"This is the house," he spoke. "I came here a year ago. I go away to-night. I had hoped to find it. I promised Bertha. I came alone. I had reasons to believe I had solved it. I found the Rhamda and the Nervina. I had iron will and courage—also strength. The Rhamda was never able to control me. My life is gone but not my will. Now I have left him another. Do not surrender, Harry. It is a gruesome task; but hold on to the end. Help me up the steps. There now. Just wait a minute till I procure a stimulant."

He did not ring for a servant. That I noticed. Instead he groped about for a key, unlocked the door and stumbled into a room. He fumbled for a minute among some glasses.

"Will you switch on a light?" he asked.

Hobart struck a match; when he found it he pressed the button.

"There now," said Watson. "Boys, I can hope you don't think evil of me, but I cannot help it. I never drank, you know. It is the only thing that will hold me—this liquor. I must explain what I can—then. Well, one of you must take my place."

I was thankful for the liquor. Without it he would revert to the stupor. Life was at a low ebb. He was striving to condense enough of it to tell the story. I thought of the envelope that Dr. Hansen had given me and passed it over. At the same time I breathed a prayer for the specialist.

THE ROOM in which we were standing was a large one, fairly well furnished, and lined on two sides with book-shelves; in the center was an oak table cluttered about with papers, a couple of chairs, and on one of them a long pipe, which, somehow, I did not think of as Watson's. He noticed my look.

"Jerome's," he explained. "We live here—Jerome the detective, and myself. He has been here since the day of the doctor's disappearance. I came a year ago. He is in Nevada at present. That leaves me alone. You will notice the books. Mostly occult: partly mine, partly the detective's. We have gone at it systematically from

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the beginning. We have learned almost everything but what would help us. Mostly sophistry—and guesswork. Beats all how much ink has been wasted to say nothing. We were after the Blind Spot."

"But what is it? Is it in this house?"

"I can answer one part of your question," he answered, "but not the other. It is here somewhere, some place. Jerome is positive of that. You remember the old lady? The one who died? Her actions were rather postive even if feeble. She led Jerome to this next room." He turned and pointed; the door was opened. I could see a sofa and a few chairs; that was all.

"It was in there. The bell. Jerome never gets tired of telling. A church bell. In the center of the room. At first I did not believe; but now I accept it all. I know, but what I know is by intuition."

"Sort of sixth sense?"

"Yes. Or foresight."

"You never saw this bell nor found it? Never were able to arrive at an explanation?"

"No."

"How about the Rhamda? The Nervina? Do they come to this house?"

"Not often."

"How do they come in? Through the window?"

He smiled rather sadly: "I do not know. At least they come. You shall see them yourself. The Rhamda has something to do with Dr. Holcomb. Somehow his very concern tells me the doctor is safe. Undoubtedly the professor made a great discovery. But he was not alone. He had a co-worker—the Rhamda. For reasons of his own the Rhamda wishes to control the Blind Spot."

"Then the professor is in this Blind Spot."

"We think so. At least it is our conjecture. We do not know."

"Then you do not think it trickery?"

"No, hardly. Harry, you know better than that. Can you imagine the great doctor the dupe of a mere trickster? The professor was a man of great science and was blessed with an almighty sound head. But he had one weakness."

Hobart spoke up.

"What is it, Chick? I think I know what you mean. The old boy was honest?"

"Exactly. He had been a scholar all his life. He taught ethics. He believed in right. He practiced his creed. When he came to the crucial experiment he found himself dealing with a rogue. The Rhamda helped him just so far; but once he had the professor in his power it was not his purpose to release him until he was secure of the Blind Spot."

"I see," I spoke. "The man is a villain. I think we can handle him."

But Watson shook his head.

"That's just it, Harry! The man! If he were a man I could have handled him in short order. That's what I thought at first. Do not make any mistake. Do not try violence. That's the whole crux of the difficulty. If he were only a man! Unfortunately, he is not."

"Not a man!" I exclaimed. "What do you mean. Pray, then, what is he?"

"He is a fantom."

I glanced at Hobart and caught his eye. Hobart believed him! The poor pallid face of Watson, the athlete; there was nothing left to him but his soul! I shall not forget Watson as he sat there, his lean, long fingers grasping the brandy glass, his eyes burning and his life holding back from the pit through sheer will and courage. Would I come to this? Would I have the strength to measure up to his standard?

Hobart broke the tension.

"Chick is right. There is something in it, Harry. Not all of the secrets of the universe have been unlocked by any means. By the way, shake me out one of those coffin-nails. I never smoked one in my life, but I have heard they are good for the nerves. There. Light it. Now, Chick, about details. Have you any data—any notes?"

Watson rose. I could see he was grateful.

"You believe me, don't you, Hobart?

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It is good. I had hoped to find someone, and I found you two. Harry, remember what I have told you. Hold the ring. You take my place. Whatever happens, stick out to the end. You have Hobart to help you. Now just a minute. The library is here; you can look over my books. I shall return in a moment."

HE STEPPED out into the hall; we could hear his weary feet dragging down the hallway—a hollow sound and a bit uncanny. Somehow my mind rambled back to that account I had read in the supplement—Jerome's story—"Like weary bones dragging slippers." And the old lady. Who was she? Why was every one in this house pulled down to exhaustion—the words of the old lady, I could almost hear them; the dank air murmuring their recollection. "Now there are two. Now there are two!"

I shook it off and endeavored to amuse myself by watching the pathetic contest that was going on between Hobart's fat fingers and the cigarette. You didn't shake Hobart very often. He had taken to tobacco. I was nervous. Came the insistent shivering croon out of the stillness. "Now there are two. Now there are two!"

"What's the matter, Harry?"

Perhaps I was frightened. I do not know. I looked around. The sound of Watson's footsteps had died away; there was a light in the back of the building coming towards us.

"Nothing! Only—damn this place, Hobart. Don't you notice it? It's enough to eat your heart out."

"Rather interesting," said Hobart. Just the same he burned himself and the smoke got into his eyes. It was too interesting for me. I stepped over to the shelves and looked at the titles. Sanscrit and Greek; German and French—the Vedas, Sir Oliver Lodge, Besant, Spinoza, a conglomeration of all ages and tongues; a range of metaphysics that was as wide as Babel, and about as enlightening. As Babel? Over my shoulders came the strangest sound of all, weak, piping, tremulous, fearful—"Now there are two. Now there are two." My heart gave a fearful leap. "Soon there will be three! Soon—"

I turned suddenly about. I had a fearful thought. I looked at Hobart. A strange, insidious fear clutched up at me. Was the thought intrinsic? If not, where had it come from? Three! I strained my ears to hear Watson's footsteps. He was in the back part of the building. I must have some air.

"I am going to open the door, Hobart," I spoke. "The front door, and look out into the street."

"Don't blame you much. Feel a bit that way myself. About time for Dr. Higgins. Here comes Chick again. Take a look outside and see if the doc is coming."

I opened the door and looked out into the dripping fog bank. What a pair of fools we were! We both knew it, and we were both seeking an excuse. We looked at each other. In the next room through the curtains I could see the weak form of Watson; he was bearing a light.

Suddenly the light went out.

I was at high tension; the mere fact of the light was nothing, but it meant a world at that moment—a strange sound—a struggle—then the words of Watson—Chick Watson's:

"Harry! Harry! Hobart! Harry! Come here! It is the Blind Spot!"

It was in the next room. The despair of that call is unforgettable, like that of one suddenly falling into space. Then the light dropped to the floor. I could see the outlines of his figure and a weird, single string of incandescence. Hobart turned and I leaped. It was a blur, the form of the man melting into nothing. I sprang into the room, tearing down the curtains. Hobart was on top of me. But we were too late. I could feel the vibrancy of something uncanny as I rushed across the room intervening. Through my mind the staccatoed thrill of terror. It had come suddenly, and in climax. It was over before it had commenced. We landed full force into the room. The light had

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gone out. Only by the gleam from the other room could we make out each other's faces. The air was vibrant, magnetic. There was no Watson. But we could hear his voice. Dim and fearful, coming down the corridors of time.

"Hold that ring, Harry! Hold that ring!" Then the faint despair out of the weary distance, faint, but a whole volume:

"The Blind Spot!"

It was over just that quickly. The whole thing climaxed into an instant. It is difficult to describe. One cannot always analyze sensation. Mine, I am afraid, were muddled. A thousand insistent thoughts clashed through my brain. Horror, wonder, doubt! I have only one persistent and predominating recollection. The old lady! I could almost feel her coming out of the shadows. There was sadness and pity; out of the stillness and the corners. What had been the dirge of her sorrow?

"Now there are three!"

IT WAS Hobart who came to first. His voice was good to hear. It was natural; it was sweet and human, but it was pregnant with disappointment: "We are fools, Harry; we are fools!"

I could only stare. I remember saying: "The Blind Spot?"

"Yes," returned Hobart, "the Blind Spot. But what is it? We saw him go. Did you see it?"

"It gets me," I answered. "He just vanished into space. It—" Frankly I was afraid.

"It tallies well with the supplements. The old lady and Jerome. Remember?"

"And the bell?" I looked about the room.

"Exactly. Phenomena! Watson was right. I just wonder—but the bell? Remember the doctor? 'The greatest day since Columbus.' No, don't cross the room. Harry, I am a bit leary. A great discovery! I should say it was. How do you account for it?"

"Supernatural."

Fenton shook his head.

"By no means! It is the gateway to the universe—into Cosmos." His eyes sparkled. "My Lord, Harry! Don't you see! Once we control it. The Blind Spot! What is beyond? We saw Chick Watson go. Before our eyes. Where did he go to? It beats death itself."

I started across the room, but Hobart caught me with both arms: "No, no, no, Harry. My Lord! I don't want to lose you. No! You foolhardy little cuss—stand back!"

THE AWAKENING OF MR. A.
MR. A.: Whew! I hate the very thought of having to take a cathartic.
MR. B.: You wouldn't if you'd only try Ex-Lax. It tastes swell—just like chocolate.
MR. A.: Why, that's what we give to the youngsters. What I need is dynamite!
MR. B.: Don't kid yourself! Ex-Lax is plenty effective, but it won't upset you.
LATER
MR. A.: Boy, I feel like a million this morning! That Ex-Lax sure is great stuff!
MR. B.: You said it, pal! We've been using Ex-Lax in our family for 80 years!
The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet gentle! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.
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He threw me violently against the wall. The impact quite took my breath.

"Harry," he was saying, "for the love of Heaven, listen to reason! Have we got to have a knock-down and drag-out on this of all nights? Have I got to lick you again? Do you want to roll into the Blind Spot?"

Why did God curse me with such a temper? On such moments as this I could feel something within me snapping. It was fury and unreason. How I loved him! And yet we had fought a thousand times over just such provocation. Over his shoulders I could see the still open door that led into the street; the heavy form was hanging through the opening; out of the corner of my eye I caught the lines of the form stepping out of the shadows—it crossed the room and stood beside Hobart Fenton. It was Rhamda Avec!

I leaped. The fury of a thousand conflicts—and the exultation. For the glory of such moments it is well worth dying. One minute flying through the air—the old catapult tackle—and the next a crashing of bone and sinew. We rolled over, head on, and across the floor. Curses and execrations; the deep bass voice of Hobart:

"Hold him, Harry! Hold him! That's the way! Hold him! Hold him!"

We went crashing about the room. He was the slipperiest thing I had ever laid hold of. But he was bone—bone and sinew; he was a man! I remember the wild thrill of exultation at the discovery. It was battle! And death! The table went over, we went spinning against the wall, a crash of falling bookcases, books and broken glass, a scurry and a flying heap of legs and arms. He was wonderfully strong and active, like a panther. Each time I held him he would twist out like a cat, straighten, and throw me out of hold. I clung on, fighting, striving for a grip, working for the throat. He was a man—a man! I remembered that he must never get away. He must account for Watson.

In the first rush I was a mad man. The mere force of my onslaught had borne him down. But in a moment he had recovered and was fighting systematically. As much as he could he kept over on one side of me, always forcing me toward the inner room where Watson had disappeared. In spite of my fury he eluded every effort that I made for a vital part. We rolled, fought, struck and struggled.

I could hear Hobart's bass thundering: "Over! Over! Under! Look out! Now you've got him! Harry! Harry! Look out! Hold him, for the love of Heaven! I see his trick. That's his trick. The Blind Spot!"

It was like Hobart tearing through the center in the days of old. We were rolled clear over, picked, heaved, shoved against the front wall. There were three! The great heaving bulk of Fenton; the fighting tiger between us; and myself! Surely such strength was not human; we could not pin him; his quickness was uncanny; he would uncoil, twist himself and throw us loose. Gradually he worked us away from the front wall and into the center of the room.

WE KNEW his game now, both of us. He was working us toward the inner room and his cursed Blind Spot. He would throw us into the abyss. We were all in rags and tatters. I was torn and bleeding. The tense face of Hobart, his veins standing out, his muscles bulged, all as flitting as vision. The Rhamda twisted. We went whirling around, the three of us rollling over—through the door.

Could any mere man fight so? Hobart was as good as a ton; I was as much for action. Slowly, slowly in spite of our efforts, he was working us toward the Blind Spot. Confident of success, he was over, around, and in and under. In a spin of a second he went into the aggressive. He fairly bore us off our feet. We were on the last inch of our line; the stake was—

What was it? We all went down. A great volume of sound! We were inside a bell! My whole head buzzed to music and a roar; the whir of a thousand vibrations, the inside of sound. I fell face downward; the room went black.

TO BE CONTINUED

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The Editors' Page

YOU will find that each succeeding issue of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES conforms further with the readers' requests. Many readers have suggested that an illustrated cover would improve the appearance of the magazine. We hope you like the cover Virgil Finlay has done for you this month.

—•—

Next month will bring "The Devil of the Western Sea," the colorful classic that so many of you have been asking for. It is a complete novelet, and fantastic in the very best sense.

Letters have asked just when "Darkness and Dawn" will start. It is scheduled for the issue after next. That will be the May issue.

—•—

We have received hundreds of enthusiastic comments on the stories published in the first five numbers of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES. There is no doubt about the standing of "The Radio Man" and "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" among the great fantastic stories of all time. The letters bear witness to their being "tops" and the only problem is to choose the order in which more of the same kind of classics are to be presented.

—•—

Your second installment of "The Blind Spot" will be on the newsstands March 6. The installment in this issue is the start-off of a real thriller which gets more exciting with every succeeding part. So get around to your newsdealer before his supply is gone. If your newsdealer is sold out, you can obtain back issues by sending 15c to FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES, 280 Broadway, New York.

—•—

Among the interesting suggestions in a letter to "The Readers' Viewpoint" from Norman Knudson of Ogden, Utah, was one that a list of past stories in order of merit should be printed. Below, you will find the published stories listed in the order of ratings given them in the readers' letters.

—•—

In Order of Popularity

Sept.-Oct.: The Girl in the Golden Atom; The Moon Pool; Karpen the Jew; The Whimpus; The Witch-Makers; Blind Man's Buff; Space Station No. 1.

November: The Conquest of the Moon Pool; Almost Immortal; The Moon Metal; The Radiant Enemies; Fruit of the Forbidden Tree; The World in the Balance; The Man with the Glass Heart.

December: The Radio Man; The Conquest of the Moon Pool; The Lord of Death; The Diminishing Draft; Who Is Charles Avison?; Lights; The Gravity Experiment.

January: On the Brink of 2000; The Conquest of the Moon Pool; The Radio Man; An Astral Gentleman; The Red Germ of Courage; The "V" Force; Behind the Curtain.

February: The Man Who Saved the Earth; The Conquest of the Moon Pool; The Sky Woman; The Radio Man; Son of the Stars; The Plunge of the "Knupfen"; The Kiss of Death.

—•—

The lists of stories sent in by readers who recall them as top-notch examples of science fiction and weird yarns, are very helpful. Let's have more from you!

—The Editors

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The Planet Juggler

By J. GEORGE FREDERICK

Earth, torn from its orbit by the science of Canopus, defies a cosmic dictator

CHAPTER I

FROM OUT THE SPACES

FAR down below appeared the lamps of Madison Square and the lights of windows that looked like illuminated children's blocks, piled high. The twin lights of the vehicles of Fifth Avenue and Broadway moved about like iridescent bubbles in the waters of a stream.

The wireless telegraph operator in the little room in the great white tower was standing by the window, looking idly down upon it all.

Suddenly, without an instant's warning, the room was filled with an incredibly fast sparking at the apparatus, with flashes of light which threw a fierce, pallid light upon everything. The operator wheeled about, astonished, and strode to the head-piece attached to a cord, which contained the telephonic receiver used for receiving messages in the Morse code.

But before he reached it, the diaphragm of the receiver crackled as if it would burst—as a telephone receiver of ordinary use crackles when lightning hits the wire. *"Hallo, Earth! Hallo, Earth! Do you understand? Hallo, Earth! Hallo, Earth!"* —and ran on indefinitely, in Esperanto, the universal language which was by this time used by all the intelligent classes of the earth.

"Hallo, Earth! Hallo, Earth!"

The operator had imagination, and the strange and queer accent of the voice, and the startling cosmic manner of address, set wild visions moving in his head. But, no, somebody was having fun with the anonymous opportunities of the system.

For one whole minute the voice kept calling, "Hallo, Earth!" and then it ceased.

Almost instantly thereafter there was a medley of messages in the Morse code: Sandy Hook, Bayonne, Atlantic Highlands —even Cape Cod, and finally Glace Bay, inquired of each other and everybody:

"Was that your office?"

It took five minutes before the mystifying information went round that nobody knew anything about it.

This was forming the absorbing topic of gossip over the system, when suddenly communication was cut off abruptly by a series of high-frequency waves which completely annihilated the system's currents. Once more the strangely accented voice said:

"Hallo, Earth! Hallo, Earth! Do you understand?"

It kept this up for several minutes, and then suddenly it said:

"Call all your rulers of the earth together and have them do as I bid before the next moon's course, or I will cause your entire planet to fall into the sun. Do you understand?"

Then it repeated the same words again, carefully and deliberately.

The operator stood staring at the instrument with dilated eyes and a fixed look of amazement and incomprehension on his face. He dashed off a message to Bayonne, asking, "Did you hear that?"

But before Bayonne had a chance to reply, the high-frequency current again cut in, and the receiver, which the operator could not hold to his ear without pain, said:

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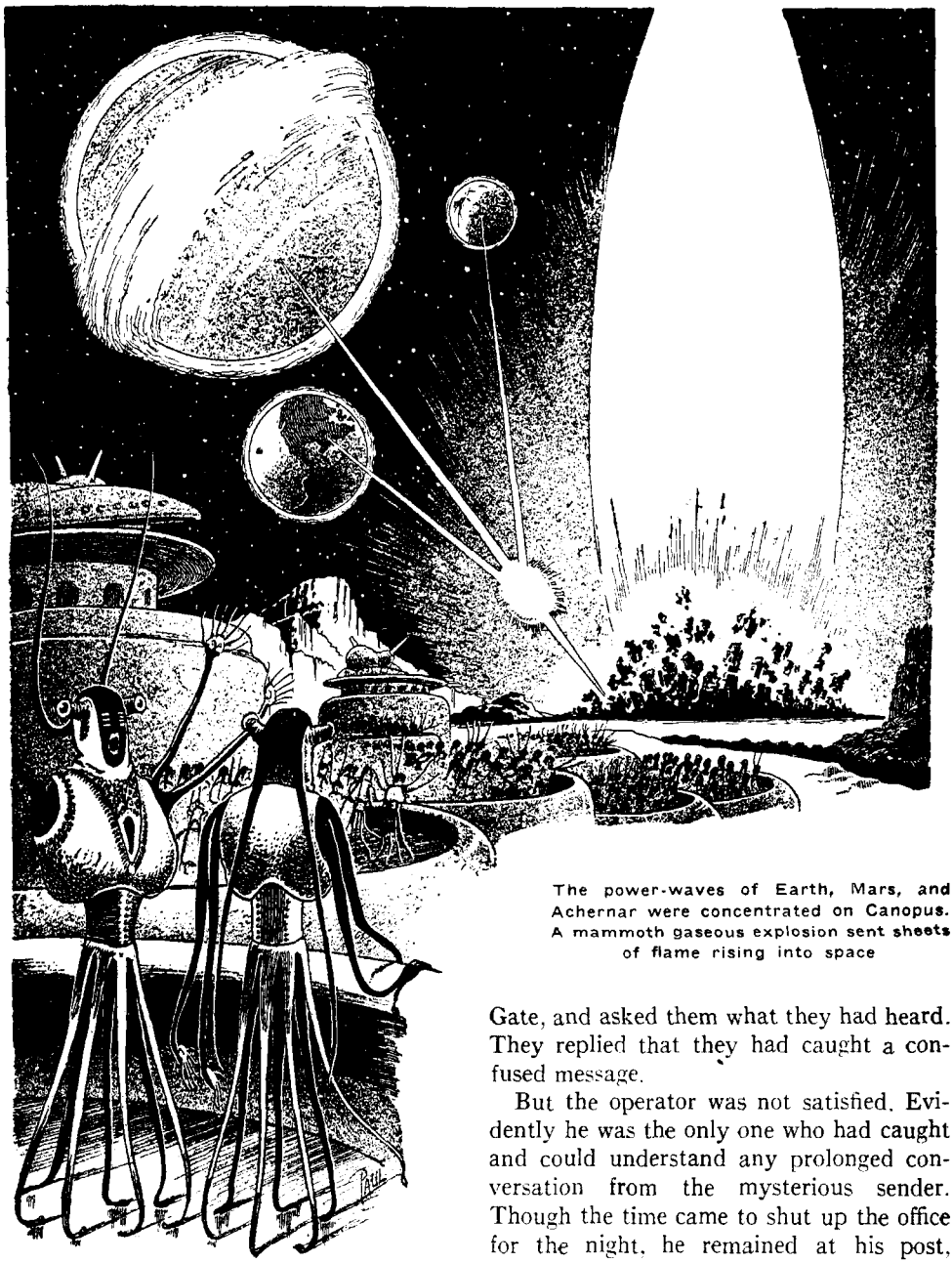

The power-waves of Earth, Mars, and Achernar were concentrated on Canopus. A mammoth gaseous explosion sent sheets of flame rising into space

"Hallo, Earth! Do you understand?"

Then, once more, it repeated the entire conversation three times.

The operator was completely excited. A clammy perspiration broke out on his face, and he flung open the windows with a nervous jerk. He called Fort Hamilton and Sea Gate, and asked them what they had heard. They replied that they had caught a confused message.

But the operator was not satisfied. Evidently he was the only one who had caught and could understand any prolonged conversation from the mysterious sender. Though the time came to shut up the office for the night, he remained at his post, hoping for another message. He waited a half-hour, and then he was rewarded.

"Hallo, Earth! Do you understand?" This was repeated a number of times; and then: *"Get to work at once and fix up a station to talk to me. You need higher-powered coils, higher aerials, proper angles, and greater horse-power spark generation.*

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Get your best electrician and let me tell him how to fix it up. Do it at once, or you'll never have the chance. I can dump the earth into the sun in twenty-four hours, and you've got to do as I say. I am talking from one of the fixed stars— Do you understand all that? Hallo, Earth!"

The operator wrote down the words with a feeling of ground sinking underneath him. The cynical part of him was urging him, as he wrote, to regard the thing as a joke; but some imaginative sense strongly induced him to consider it seriously.

"Jove!" he said, as he read the message through after the voice had ceased, "I can't stand this. I'm going to send for more brains than I've got to face this thing."

THEN he telephoned to the city editor of a newspaper on which he had worked in the telegraph-room. He knew the man personally, but when he told him of the incident, in a half apologetic, half excited voice, the editor laughed uproariously.

"Mac," he said patronizingly, "for Heaven's sake, go home and sleep it off. Don't stay in your office and monkey with the instruments in your condition."

But Mac was so obviously intense and persistent, and talked so rationally, that the editor listened again.

"Send a wireless to Bayonne or anywhere on the coast," Mac urged with great earnestness, "and if they say they haven't received wireless telephone messages which they don't understand, then talk to me as if I had 'em; but if they admit having received them, send one of the boys from the staff up, and also any electrical authority you can chase up tonight, and they'll hear something as mysterious as ever I heard in my life."

"All right, Mac," said the editor good-naturedly.

Evidently, the editor found something worth investigating after he had consulted the other wireless stations in the New York zone, for shortly afterward he telephoned again, in a more excited voice:

"I'm sending up Jones, and Elverson, the big electrical man, whom we found just leaving a banquet. There must be some good story in this thing. Don't keep them too long; I want the story for the first page."

He presumed it was some interesting new development in wireless science, nothing more. But the operator was not satisfied that it was nothing more, for about every ten minutes the "Hallo, Earth!" call came in on the receiver.

The electrician, who was the country's famous genius at electrical communication of every sort, was only curious and skeptical when it came.

He listened patiently to Mac's story, with the suggestion of a sardonic smile on his lips, and then went to work to interrogate for himself all the wireless stations. He questioned two transatlantic liners which had just reported to Sandy Hook, and when they reported the same thing identically, he got to work in earnest.

He was just preparing to ask Clifden—over on the other half of the world—about it, when once more the high-frequency current destroyed everything but its own message:

"Hallo, Earth! Hallo, Earth!"

Elverson, who had every mechanical possibility of the wireless at his finger's end, sat staring at the coils, his hand on the large brass key, with a look of profound amazement gathering on his face. When the voice ceased, he sent his message to Clifden with considerable eagerness. Clifden replied that its lines were working strangely, and that a peculiar current was at intervals dropping a strange noise into the receivers, which sounded like a far-off voice.

Then Elverson sent messages by telegraph over the regular lines to Chicago, and here he learned that a voice was being heard in the receivers, to the astonishment of the wireless operators. They said that the large telegraph companies were reporting trouble with their lines, as if electrical-storms were interfering.

Elverson rang up the New York telephone office, and found that no long-

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distance line was working satisfactorily.

Then once more the current broke in, and at the sound of it the reporter, who had been dozing, sat bold upright. The voice was stentorian, with a peculiar bass quality.

"Hallo, Earth! Get to work on this at once. Get greater horsepower spark generation, higher-frequency current, and get your aerial up higher. Direct the spark at right angles from the plane of the earth. Do you understand? Then you can talk to me. Do it before the moon gets into your night sky next month, or I will drop your whole planet into the sun. I can control every bit of your magnetic rotary power, and put you where I want to."

When the voice ceased there was a deathlike stillness in the towerroom. Elverson gazed at the telephonic head-piece from which the voice had spoken, as if fascinated by a serpent; his eyes glowed supernaturally in the violet tube-light over the desk. He reached for the copies of the messages the operator had previously received and transcribed, and studied them a long, long time.

Finally the reporter stirred.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Elverson," he said, "my paper goes to press very soon; what shall I say about this?"

He wore a foolish smile as he talked, for he thought it a joke.

Elverson did not answer for a full minute; then he looked up vaguely.

"Eh?" he inquired, in the tone of a man roused from a deep sleep. "Did any one speak to me?"

The reporter patiently repeated his question.

"You can say," said Elverson, struggling under strong bewilderment, "that unless I am as crazy as a loon, a Napoleon of the universe on some far-off star has communicated with us, and means to subdue the earth or destroy it.

"When you go down, please order a lunch for me at a restaurant, and send half a dozen messenger-boys. I'm not going away from here until I know exactly what's going on."

CHAPTER II

A CONSOLIDATED UNIVERSE

ELVERSON and the operator stayed at the instrument all night. Only repetitions of the previous messages were received, however. Together the two men went over the ground carefully, noting every scientific detail of the mysterious communications and eliminating every possible chance of humbuggery.

As soon as morning came, Elverson sent for a number of fellow scientists, aerial experts, and workmen.

The messages still continued to come at intervals, and by this time the entire country—indeed, the world—was aware that mysterious electrical phenomena of some kind were present, greatly to the detriment of our systems of communication. Crowds of people loitered outside of the wireless offices, and policemen had to be called.

Five scientific men, including Bardi, the perfecter of wireless systems, and Kale, the authority on telephonic science, sat in the tower-room, gravely listening to the occasional interruptions of the formidable high-frequency current which swept everything before it for four hours. After spending an hour holding communication with various parts of the earth by telegraph, telephone, and wireless, on the subject of electrical disturbances, they went to a private dining-room in a nearby hotel and held a conference.

Meantime, on Elverson's orders, another room was being equipped by workmen with wireless apparatus, with an aerial extension to the flagpole on the top of the building. Arrangements were made for as high horse-power spark generation as modern facilities could produce.

After the scientific men had been conferring for a long time, a new message came from the unknown voice. It was quite lengthy, and it gave minute electrical directions, which the experts read with intense interest. It was completely technical:

"You need exactly 248,000 per second waves. Take your regular city power current, alternating, and polyphase it and

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quadruple-induct it, and then establish a perfect induction-balance with it in a vacuum."

There followed complete instructions about getting the proper angle off the plane of the earth, at which to loose the spark. And directions for connecting and protecting the mouthpieces and receivers for conversation.

The five scientific men read these words over and over again, and began to draw diagrams. After an hour of absorbing work, Kale, the telephone expert, said, with a rather flushed face:

"Gentlemen, the last doubt has been removed from my mind about the actuality of this message from another world than ours. The information, just received, gives us directions which any mechanic could follow, and makes possible wireless telephony to any part of the earth, to say nothing of the planets and stars."

"Then let's get to work at once," said Elverson enthusiastically.

The telephone expert selected ten men from his laboratory, and they were put to work at once carrying out the instructions received. Inside of a week the work was finished, and the little group of five, together with carefully selected newspaper men, were allowed in the tower-room.

The world by this time was wrought up to a high pitch of excitement and expectation at prospect of communication with another sphere. It was popularly supposed that Mars was the voice being heard—that is, by those who were not still skeptical of the entire matter, despite the ceaseless and mysterious interferences with electric currents in both hemispheres, and the credulity of scientists who examined the messages which were still regularly repeating themselves, and were now audible in four or five of the wireless offices.

It was Elverson who spoke the first words into the complicated sound-condenser which served as the sending apparatus, and which set in motion the intricate series of induced currents, the final one of which ascended into space, into the infinite void which for so many thousand centuries had not given a sign of life to terrestrial creatures.

"Hallo!" he said.

Hardly had he ceased speaking, when a voice, perfectly audible in the remotest corner of the room, said:

"Hallo! Good for you, Earth! I didn't think you'd get it finished so promptly and so accurately. I congratulate you on your ability to follow technical instructions. But please heighten your resistance just a trifle; the atmospheric conditions are not so good tonight. Your voice sounds muffled."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hartwell, the prominent astronomer, who was present. "He says 'night.' That means very probably that he is speaking from a star in the Southern Hemisphere."

"I will save you the trouble of speculating," said the voice very promptly, showing that the speaker heard the most ordinary conversation in the room; "I am on *Canopus*."

The astronomer gasped.

"Why," he said in bewilderment and incredulity, "Canopus is so far away that we haven't been able to measure its parallax yet!"

"It is three hundred and forty-five ten thousands of a second of an arc," was the immediate response. "According to your methods of computation."

"How do you know our methods of computation and our universal language?" asked one of the scientists who had been persistently skeptical.

"I have been able to hear conversations and discussions on your earth for the last *sovoni tulna*—I beg pardon—I mean, in your universal language, for ten years. But up to a short time ago I could not make my voice heard upon your earth, even though I could send it to within your reach. It was not until you perfected your wireless system that I could get my voice to your ears.

"Therefore, I have had ten years' opportunity to relate the things I saw to words I have heard, and connect them to your habits, speech, and ideas. I can

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see earth objects from here better than human eyes. By the way, if the dignified gentleman with the bald head and a small wart on his neck, who has the seat near the Leyden jar table, will hurry to his factory, he may help to save some of his property. *It is on fire!"*

The scientist and manufacturer whom the description fitted started, looked half foolish and half frightened and undecided. He went to the telephone, and in a few minutes rushed out, crying: "It's true, gentlemen! It's true!"

The company was deeply impressed.

"WILL you not give us more scientific knowledge which will advance civilization here on earth?" asked Elverson respectfully.

A hard, dry laugh came from the receiving-horn.

"Now that I've had a little chat with you, I am ready to 'talk business,' as seems to be a common phrase with you.

"This star, as your astronomers already know, is deficient in metallic composition. Your method of spectrum analysis places it in what you call type one, with strong hydrogen lines. You can readily see, therefore, that such a metal as gold has an immense value in society on this star.

"Now, as your planet is the only one in your solar system which is inhabited, besides Mars (whose inhabitants, I find, have never taken the trouble to mine gold), and as there are only two other inhabited stars in as much of the universe as I can see—*I want your gold which you have mined.*

"I need huge sums of it to persuade workmen to make the paraphernalia I use, and keep it in order, and the accomplishment of my one ambition will demand more monetary value than I can get on this star."

"What is your ambition?" asked Elverson, in a voice hollow with an unnamable fear.

"My ambition," came the firm reply, "is to consolidate the numberless solar systems about me into one huge sphere. Cool it automatically to the proper temperature for the maintenance of the most highly developed life which I can find on any sphere within reach of my *rytholic* refractor.

"In other words, I want to hasten cosmic evolution by scientific means and accomplish the survival of the fittest without nature's slow waste. I will destroy the civilizations which are below a certain stage of development."

"How does the earth stand in relation to other inhabited planets?" asker Elverson eagerly.

"Fourth," was the reply. "Therefore, she is useless in my plan. You rank even below the civilization on Mars in your solar system; but I have no use for Mars, either, just as I have no use for the civilization on Achernar, as you call the star near me. Only Sirius and this star, Canopus, will share in the consolidated civilization. We have been in communication with Sirius for many centuries, and our language and ideas and interests are already unified.

"But we had better get to the business I have with you. *I need, and must and will have, either the gold which you have mined, or else the metallic elements in which your entire solar system is so rich.* To be frank, I would much prefer to follow my original plan, and release the rotary magnetic power which keeps yours and all of the solar planets from dropping into the sun, and then take the entire resulting nebulae in one lump into my new sphere.

"But my more immediate need is gold, which is our standard of values here: and the little which your planet has will give me the desired purchasing power without depreciating our monetary standard. Therefore, I am willing to let your solar system alone, if you will give me the gold."

"But," began Elverson, and then stopped for a moment, for sheer confusion of thought at the stupendous ideas which had been spoken to him in the most matter-of-fact conversational tone. "How could we possibly get the gold to you? You are hundreds of thousands of miles farther off than our sun, and our sun is almost

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ninety-three millions of miles away from us!"

A laugh echoed from the receiving-cone—a pitying, impatient, feelingless laugh.

"That will be easy. I can instruct your engineers how to make an air-ship which will carry five thousand tons up beyond the region of the atmospheric disturbance of the earth's motion—which is about four and three-quarters of your miles high—and there I will meet you with one of our regular space-ships, which are able to run within that distance of any sphere of your temperature. You will simply unload into that ship."

"Do you mean to offer us the alternative of giving up as much of our gold as we can gather, or else having the earth and our whole system of planets thrown into the sun, which would naturally resolve the sun into vapor again—that you would seize for use in your new sphere?" asked Elverson.

"Once more I must compliment you," replied the voice, in a suave but cold tone, "for getting my statements perfectly right. Now, please do whatever you find necessary to fulfill this condition quickly. It will take two years before I have the gold in my hands, anyhow; and as my span of life is only four hundred years more, measured in your time, you can see how impatient I am to get started on the manufacture and operation of the great deflectors and concentrators of energy which will be necessary to swing stars from their orbits, and to hasten their activity of temperature, so that my consolidated sphere will be realized.

"I am sorry to appear tyrannical to you; but you don't eat gold, and you can readily subsist without it. But if you do not fulfill the condition, remember that I *will not hesitate one second to destroy your entire civilization and solar system.*

"I will say good-by now for ten days of your time. I will expect you to be ready with a statement of the amount of gold available, approximately, and with engineers who will be capable of taking instructions to build the air-ship."

CHAPTER III

THE CELESTIAL THREAT

WHEN the voice ceased, the men looked at each other with many kinds of feeling expressed in their faces.

"Bah!" cried Bardi, the wireless expert, "while I cannot help but believe that the message is really from some other sphere, I cannot credit such a stupendous thing as dumping the earth into the sun by any human agency.

"Think of the time which would be consumed merely in the falling of the earth into the sun!" remarked the astronomer. "We deal with hours and days. Cosmic bodies move by the million years."

"I don't know," remarked Kale dubiously. "I confess that I have confidence in what that man—that being—for only heaven knows his physical shape—has said. He talks like a man with a mechanical mind, which has an almost incomprehensible grasp of principles which we have just barely named yet in mechanics. The best thing we can do is to publish throughout the world what we have heard, and invite scientific and popular discussion of it, and in ten days have an international committee of scientists and statesmen ready to talk to this piratical monster."

Kale's plan was adopted, and that day the full report of the messages and the report of the scientists were broadcast.

As it was certain to do, it provoked a vast amount of ridicule. The solemn attestations of the five most prominent American scientists made the matter serious, however, and on the tenth day a very distinguished company of scientists and governmental representatives met, and were ready to hear the voice of Canopus; also, to give approximate estimates of the gold in their countries.

The representatives met in secret session. Practically every one of them had misgivings as to the genuineness of a voice from Canopus; several astronomers were even jocular over the matter.

When Elverson had established connection he said:

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"We have assembled here scientific and governmental men from practically every country. Nearly all of them are skeptical as to the reality of your making good your threats. How can you prove it to them?"

"Very quickly," came the reply in a frosty tone. "Ask them to try to find out what's the matter with your electric power systems in about three minutes from now."

In the stated time, messengers were dispatched to the headquarters offices of electrical concerns, and at the same time the electric lights in the room suddenly twitched and went out. The messengers returned with excitement—transportation systems were not running, and all electrical communication was utterly out of order.

"Ah, you'll believe me now, will you?" asked a sardonic voice from the receiver, a few minutes later, when the lights suddenly went on again. "Now, to show you that I'm not an electrical faker from your own little pebble of a planet, suppose that you communicate with the other half of the world, and see whether this high-frequency wave disturbance which I have just let loose on you, was confined only to your tiny locality. And while you're at it, just inquire as to what has happened to Washington's monument."

A hurried dispatch was sent to Washington. This was the reply:

> Half of monument toppled over by a bolt of lightning just ten minutes ago. Great mystery.

A wireless message was sent over the regular lines to Clifden, the European office of the transatlantic system. Within ten minutes the reply came back that much damage had been done to the electric power and communication lines in every section from which reports had been received up to that minute:

> Do you know the cause?

The congress of representatives investigated the matter, however, in real earnest, and there was considerable excitement among them. An Italian delegate rose, after unmistakable evidence of the unearthly character of the communications was found by careful investigation.

"I think that in the face of the costly demonstration the world has already witnessed of the power of the genius on Canopus, it would be the better part of valor to agree to pay the tribute, however terribly it will affect our system of values to give away our gold."

An American representative rose hastily.

"What?" he asked in a stern voice. "Shall we tremble at the first sign of hostility and hasten to surrender—we, who have thrilled at the words, 'Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute?' I say, let us defend ourselves! Have we not a right to live and possess our earth, and defend it against tyranny? Let Canopus operate his diabolical machinery—and let us never surrender without a fight!"

Cheers rang through the room, and it was distinctly the sense of the people assembled that the demand of the mysterious voice from Canopus was an affront upon the dignity of the earth, and ought not to be meekly surrendered to. Elverson connected the receiver and called Canopus.

"Never mind," spoke the voice sternly; "I have heard most of your conversation without being connected—by means of my other apparatus by which I have been able to learn your language. Don't work yourselves up to any vain emotions over this matter—*I tell you finally that it will be a waste of time to make resistance.*

"You talk about the right to live. Why don't you practice that feeling to your fellow creatures? You kill because you are the most powerful—and you think it perfectly right. And so do I.

"My consolidated civilization scheme is going to systematize the universe. I am more powerful than you. Why shouldn't little, slow worlds like yours be killed off?

"I'm extending you the chance to escape that fate. You'll find to your sorrow that I'm not talking nonsense. I want to know definitely to-day whether you will give me your gold, or whether you prefer to be annihilated?"

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As soon as the harsh, impatient and threatening voice from Canopus ceased, there were at least six men on their feet.

"I move, Mr. Chairman," said a French representative, with strong feeling, "that we defy the demand made to us and bid him to do his worst! We have brains and science enough to meet any emergency."

A dozen seconds were ready, and the motion was carried with enthusiasm.

"Very well," thundered the voice from Canopus with Olympian anger. "You will soon find out how deadly it is to resist a superior power. Good-by, and prepare to die!"

CHAPTER IV

EARTH'S DEFIANCE

THE action of the conference of scientific and governmental men was praised everywhere, and the whole thing was more and more regarded as a subtle kind of fraud or sensationalism. The visiting scientists, however, were still unable to explain the communication and evidences of power, and admitted that the electrical information received from the individual on Canopus was far in advance of anything yet known on earth.

It was then August, and within three weeks an unusual heat was recorded, which stayed persistently. September and October wore on, and still the heat continued unabated. There were second crops of fruits and vegetables, and many trees bloomed again.

When, however, December came and a temperature of ninety-four degrees Fahrenheit was recorded in the large Eastern cities, and a successive series of fierce thunder showers came, the interest of the scientific world became keen. Reports came in from Northern lands indicating great suffering among those unused to warm weather. The fur-animals were dying, and ice was melting and flooding the rivers to a degree which meant the loss of thousands of dollars' worth of property.

One day there came a hurried message from the Yerkes Observatory:

> The earth is twenty degrees off its orbit, and instead of making its usual elliptical course, is quite evidently making a sharp curve toward the sun, into which it evidently threatens to tumble!

A tremor of fear and an instantaneous recalling of the threat of the voice from Canopus passed from one end of the world to the other, and business and politics were paralyzed at the portentous news. Mass-meetings were held and revival meetings started with wild enthusiasm, as revivalists predicted the prophesied end of the world, and panic-stricken masses repented of sins, real and imaginary.

A nervous clamor for action of some sort rose from everywhere, and thousands were anxious that the voice from Canopus should be appealed to again for terms of surrender.

Elverson and astronomers hurriedly computed that the earth was making for the sun at the rate of about one hundred and fifteen miles a minute, and would become hotter and hotter as time went on; and in four months, if it kept going toward the sun, all life on the planet would be destroyed.

When the people everywhere, in country, hamlet, and city, came fully to realize the meaning of the awful catastrophe imminent, a reign of absolute terror began. Business was neglected, robberies and crime flourished; wild fanatics harangued crowds in the street; like a great wave rose up the demand that something should be done. Prayers were offered to Canopus by new religious sects which sprang up, and everywhere suicides were occurring by the hundred thousand. Rich men hysterically gave away their fortunes; old enemies made friends; stolen goods were returned, and the industry of the entire world was stagnant.

Meantime, the hot weather was continuing, and January arrived with thundershowers and intermittent heat to the extent of ninety-nine degrees in the shade in New York City.

"Where is Elverson?" was the cry of newspapers and people, for no one had

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been able to find him. Finally, he was located in New Jersey in a large, temporary laboratory, where he was working under visible strain and excitement.

At the request of many mass-meetings and messages from Europe, where the same conditions existed, Elverson again arranged connection with the wireless system on the top of the tower, and, after trying for two days, was able to get connection with the formidable power on Canopus.

"Ah," said the voice cynically, "you are back again, with a little of your spunk fried out, I'll wager. What do you desire?"

"Great Heavens, sir!" cried Elverson. "Have you no pity for the thousands whom the heat is prostrating and killing, or the doom you are bringing upon half a billion people with souls?"

"What are a heap of vermin grown from your dust, to me?" answered Canopus. "What are you worth, in a lump, to anybody? Your own chemists have many times killed as many bacilli at one operation in their laboratories, and never thought about it twice. Might is right. Progress comes from the strong consuming the weak."

"Do you fear no retribution?" cried Elverson hoarsely.

"What is retribution, and whence does it come?" asked Canopus lightly. "Don't discuss any abstract subjects with me.

"I will give you one more opportunity. Do you wish to yield up the gold, or to let it come to me eventually in a molten form, when I take your planet and your sun after the contact of the planets has reduced everything to vapor?"

"We will do anything to prevent annihilation," replied Elverson humbly. "I am authorized to say that the earth will do as you wish, and also to plead with you that you name a specific sum of gold which the world can raise without too great privation."

"I will need at least five hundred thousand tons," responded Canopus. "Now, get this much ready in one year's time, smelt it in five-hundred-pound ingots, and get a corps of engineers ready to take instructions to build the air-ship. I will immediately arrange the action of my reflecto-gravity magnets, and bring the earth very gradually back into its orbit. It will be about two months before you will be normal again. Good-by."

"Thank you," replied Elverson weakly.

WHEN the news was sent all over the world, there was immense rejoicing. Bonfires were built, bells rung, and thanks offered. The giving up of the gold was looked upon lightly, and the committees which were appointed to accomplish the collection of the metal were hopeful that the monetary standard could be changed without much loss or confusion.

Elverson was now an object of mystery. His plant was working day and night, and all his workmen refused to divulge what was going on. Rumors were spread that he had learned some great scientific thing from Canopus, and was working on it; but he would say nothing about his labors. It was known that he had had another talk with Canopus in private, at which he received full instructions to make the air-ship; but this air-ship was now being built by a large shipbuilding concern on specifications furnished them. No one could understand what the electrician might be doing.

Curiosity was still more heightened when prominent astronomers and electricians were very often seen at the plant. Later, it became known that on the New Jersey coast was being built two miles of apparatus. Guesses were immediately made that a way to harness the waves to make power had been found, and that Elverson was planning to use it in some way. A large cable was built to New York, and another curious machine was being erected in a subbasement near the tower. The latter was remodeled so that high up, across its façade, was a structure that resembled the bridge of a ship.

One day, after there had been many bitter complaints at the harm being done the business of the world by the collection

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of gold, the little group of scientists made this startling announcement:

We have succeeded in discovering a wonderful principle, and applying it.

We have discovered that by means of the fact that nitrogen, phosphorus, sulphur and oxygen are absent on the sun, we can counteract and balance gravity.

The well-known slight variation in the sun's rotary motion affords a second possibility; and with the use of terrific high-frequency waves of a new current of electricity which we have evolved out of the alternating current, we can actually *direct* gravitation.

In simpler words—*we can at any moment lift the earth from its orbit,* and what is more, *steer it wherever we will.*

In the past month we have ten times successfully steered the earth out of its orbit, unknown to any but scientific men; and manipulated it to and from a determined point.

Still more, we have been able to manipulate our newly discovered forces so that we can form a perfect magnetic screen about the earth, which no current of whatever power can pierce. Our recent dangerous situation at the hands of a terrible tyrant on Canopus, who undoubtedly uses this same force to intimidate us, stimulated our faculties to a high pitch, and, as necessity is the mother of invention, we have been working with all the power in us to be less at the mercy of the heartless Napoleon of the universe who is so insanely greedy for power.

We feel so confident of our new powers that, after carefully considering possibilities, we would not be afraid to defy Canopus and refuse to deliver the gold when his air-ship arrives for it three months from now.

We are ready to undertake the project of resisting Canopus, and hereby affirm that we consider it safe and expedient so to do.

No matter how great in power are the waves of electricity he sends here, it cannot penetrate our screen. This is proved by the fact that he has not been able to break through the screen we have built about our factory.

As he uses the same force as we do to take the earth from her orbit, but at a vastly greater distance from us, we have a great advantage over him.

WHEN the statement was given out it profoundly stirred the world.

The various plants were thrown open to the public for inspection, and conferences were again held to take action upon the matter. For a month discussion as to the advisability of making a second resistance to the greatly feared power on Canopus was bitter and exciting. At first, few would even think of doing so; but as more details were printed about the huge wave-power plant, and as thousands visited the plant, there were more and more converts to the idea of resistance.

When there was made another publicly announced journey out of the orbit, in order that people could see demonstrated the scientists' absolute control of the earth's motion, thousands more cheered for resistance. The indomitable faith and courage inherent in the human race showed itself; and six months after having prayed in a frenzy for surrender, it was enthusiastically voted to refuse Canopus the tribute he asked.

Hardly had the conference passed this vote when the little office in the tower rang with calls for the earth.

Elverson was summoned to answer it, and found Canopus endeavoring to get in communication with him.

"I've heard what you've done. I've been keeping some one watching you all the time," said the voice. "Do you mean to say, after I've started my space-ship toward you, you're going to make another resistance?"

"Exactly," replied Elverson with courage and force. "We're ready to fight you."

"I know all about it," replied Canopus. "But you are no more prepared to fight me than a snail can fight an elephant."

"My dear sir," replied Elverson, "you don't know anything about what are the means with which we'll fight. Don't try to bluff. My very first care was to prevent you from seeing what we are doing. We have got over our scare. Now you'll have to fight for everything you get from us, and for every attempt you make to destroy us. Good-by!"

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CHAPTER V

HANDS ACROSS THE VOID

THE battle was now on in earnest. There were many doleful pessimists who predicted that the earth would meet her fate, and also there were a large number of people who protested against resistance, and held mass-meetings to voice their sentiments, which were that the governments had no right to take such action lacking popular vote.

The majority, however, rallied about the scientists with a New World patriotism, in which old prejudices were forgotten.

The scientists were given by all nations large appropriations of money and consulting engineers of the best talent.

Shortly before one, midnight, there suddenly appeared in the sky an awe-inspiring electrical display. Night was practically turned into day, and for the next three hours no one went to bed. In the poorer quarters of the cities people came out into the streets and prayed, believing that the last hour had come; while in the South the negroes hysterically indulged in interminable religious meetings, fully expecting never to see the sun rise again.

Realizing the power of the electrical display to terrorize the people, Elverson sent telegrams to every part of the world, to be retelegraphed to every town and station, stating that the phenomenon was simply the meeting of the two powerful currents many miles off in the air, showing that *all currents from Canopus were being stopped.* This meant victory—at least, temporarily.

The lights in the sky were like those of an aurora borealis, but for a week the streaks covered the whole sky with an even tint of violet, merging into a rose-red. The lights flashed like the weapons of battling giants. The display lasted for the next fortnight, but after that they gradually faded, varying in intensity, and suddenly disappeared altogether. Then Elverson issued this bulletin:

> Canopus has tried to pass his powerful currents through our screen; but he has failed. The earth is not a hair-breadth out of its orbit, and there is nothing to fear. I believe, there is nothing which he can now do that we need worry about.

For one month there was absolutely no sign that Canopus had renewed his attack. Then one day there appeared to be great alarm at Elverson's office and among the scientific men on his staff. At first they would not say anything, but changed their minds and issued a statement, after alarming rumors began to spread. They said:

> **While there is no cause for real alarm we will frankly say that Canopus has made a very clever maneuver, which is worrying us.**
>
> ***Mars is out of her orbit, and Canopus is undoubtedly aiming to throw her into the sun.***
>
> **If he succeeds, the disturbance will be so great that the earth will be in grave danger.**
>
> **The only thing to be done is to use our power of navigating the earth through space, and go near enough to Mars to protect her with our high-frequency currents and throw our system of inductive screens about her. This we are preparing to do.**
>
> **We beg the people not to be alarmed if our day and night system is upset, or if the moon gets to be about six times as big as usual, or if it gets a little colder than usual, or if Mars gets bigger and bigger as we get nearer, until it fills one-hundredth part of the sky.**
>
> **These things will be perfectly normal, and all will be well. We will be back in our orbit in two months' time, though we may have to make a circuit around our entire solar system, to establish inductive screens against Canopus's efforts to throw one of our planets into the sun, and thereby destroy us. Our visit to Mars will give us the opportunity at last to realize the dream of the twentieth century, of talking to the inhabitants on Mars, and we hope to get her to cooperate with us in resisting Canopus.**

At this announcement the whole world again stopped its busy life to speculate and discuss the situation. Nobody talked about anything else; and, while there were many who felt afraid of the startling jour-

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ney out of the orbit, nearly all keenly anticipated the trip.

Elaborate precautions were taken to avoid a panic among the illiterate people who would not understand the revolution in the million-year-old habits of the world. Governments volunteered to send agents everywhere to tell the people about what was happening and calm their fears.

MEANWHILE, observatories were keeping an eye on Mars, which was slowly but surely gaining momentum in her drop from her orbit toward the sun. Careful calculations were made—as on a ship which desires to overtake another vessel in mid-sea—to find the proper place of meeting of the two planets.

Finally, up in the tower, in the presence of prominent scientists and government representatives, Elverson connected the switches on the huge switchboard on the wall, which set to work the terrific electrical voltage generated by wave motion in the monstrous plants on the Jersey shore.

"Why, there isn't a sound to mark the operation!" remarked some one with awe.

"No visible sign at all," replied Elverson, "except what you will see if you step out on the little bridge on this side."

And he led the way out. Faint echoes of a great city came aloft from the panoramic scene below them, recorded by moving lights, for it was night.

"Look up," he continued.

They saw a series of metal forks, at the point of each of which glowed a nebulous, iridescent globe of light, changing momentarily into many prismatic colors.

"Those deflectors send the current out to a point five miles or more above us, where they strike atmospheric resistance, which drives them off parallel to the circumference of the earth for a distance of half-way around the world. At Calcutta there is another plant similar to this, and at this moment they have released the current also.

"By turning our diametrically opposed currents upon each other we nullify the solar attraction, or rather balance it. In one hour we will be drifting in space, and then our direction and speed depends upon the state of the balance, plus or minus, which we shall control from this office.

"From that time until we are back in our orbit again, I shall have to sit before our inducto-meter as a captain or pilot sits before his compass, with astronomical charts before me, and in constant communication by wireless with Lick and Yerkes and the European observatories."

Ten minutes later Elverson was shut in his little room, with a guard outside the door, and no companion save a trusted messenger and his bright young laboratory assistant. The earth was gliding away from its orbit as gracefully and as naturally as though it had never unerringly followed it for so many million years.

There were many who refused to believe that the earth was out of its orbit, and who scoffed at the idea—till the disturbance in the orbit of the moon caused it to come nearer the earth and look as big as a cartwheel in the sky. In ten days Mars, too, loomed very large, and steadily grew.

Despite the best efforts of government agents and newspapers, there was a great deal of fear among the ignorant, and reports came of wild ceremonies among savage tribes in Africa and Asia, who were preparing religiously for a judgment day.

As the earth approached Mars, Elverson thought best to attempt to communicate with its inhabitants, if possible, and avert any misunderstanding. He and the staff of scientists experimented day and night till they had produced a current which could penetrate the defensive screen of the earth, and allow communication with Mars without allowing any current from Canopus to penetrate.

When they felt sure that their signals could be heard, they secured a man who had a very musical voice, capable of fine shades of expression, and gave him the task of saying "Hello!" in the most genial, pleasant, and peaceful tone which he could

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command. It was Elverson's idea that, in the absence of any language communication, it would reassure the Martians simply to be addressed in a pleasant and peaceful tone.

Kale, the telephone expert, listened by this man's side, on an extension receiver of the wireless system.

For two days the signaling was kept up, and Kale heard inarticulate sounds, which he believed to be return signals. These sounds continued, and grew louder as they drew closer; but it was two days before they were even articulate.

Then, by prearrangement, an expert linguist was summoned, and he listened also, and endeavored to construct a system of meaning from the sounds he heard. The voice was very guttural and bass, and was also very expressive.

After one whole day's study of it, the linguist declared that Mars had evidently done the same thing the earth had—selected a voice expressive of geniality, in order to express friendship. Four days later the linguist announced that the language spoken was not unlike the sound of the Italian language, and that he hoped in a few more days to exchange intelligent conversation. The Martian voice showed intelligence by repeating the words addressed to it with care and correctness.

At the end of twenty-four days of very hard work, at which time Mars glowed like a huge pale moon in the sky, looming up on the northern horizon, the expert linguist, working under Elverson's direction, announced that he could hold conversation with Mars. Its scientists had been studying the earth for centuries. They asked whether the earth could do anything to help save them from dropping into the sun, and whether the earth had anything to do with their catastrophe. Kale assured them of terrestrial friendship and succeeded in conveying the information of the earth's mission.

In order to facilitate communication without loss of time, as the earth approached nearer and nearer, three more circuits were established and other linguists stationed at them to make communication rapid and easy.

Meantime, the astronomers were very busy, for the proximity to Mars afforded a full chance for observation of the mooted canal system. Arrangements were made for a human signal system just as soon as a human figure could be distinguished by the telescopes.

THE Yerkes Observatory was the first to distinguish the figures of the Martians. They were of huge proportions—three times the height of earth's inhabitants; the scientists explained this as due to the fact that things weighed about three times as much on Mars as on the earth. Their bodies were very large, but their legs no larger than ours.

Most interesting of all were their heads. Their faces were very broad, yet with an expression of extreme refinement. Their eyes were very large and fascinating; their mouths very small. Each person carried a large black case slung over narrow shoulders by a strap, which was later explained to contain the means for locomotion in air or on surface.

There are no railroads in Mars. The canals serve as freight-carriers, and the concentrated means of travel are free to all. The black case contained, also, the means of speaking to any one anywhere at will.

Material progress, however, had for a number of centuries been at a standstill. It was learned that the Martians were poets and dreamers rather than constructive minds, though their knowledge of mechanics was in some respects far superior to ours. Music, art, and literature were their main pursuits. The civilization of Mars is millions of years older than the earth's.

Finally, when all Martians understood the nature of the earth's errand, and the earth had arrived as near as was safe—about a hundred thousand miles off—the gravity balance was established, and the carefully prepared machinery for the spreading of the inductive screen round

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the smaller planet was set in motion. Two of the lines of wireless communication with Mars were kept busy instructing the Martian engineers how to help in the job of screening off the deadly magnetic forces of Canopus. The speed of the earth and its direction was made exactly parallel to that of Mars, so as to keep near her.

For two days Mars continued to speed unabatedly toward the sun; but on the third day there was an abrupt stoppage of the impetus, which brought on heavy electrical storms and changed the temperature from a steadily rising heat to raw winds and rain. Finally the impetus became perceptibly less, and in six days Elverson, who from his office on New York's big tower controlled the movements of both planets, was able to hold them absolutely motionless, save for the revolutions upon their own axis.

By this time the engineers on Mars had full instructions how to construct the screen to protect themselves in the future from Canopus, and how to navigate their planet, and their leading scientists were planning to assist the earth in protecting the entire solar system from the ambitious greed of Canopus. Electricians were taught the means of controlling the motion of Mars, and a plant was hastily erected so that it could be tried before the earth went back to her orbit.

The earth waited a month, by common consent, and then stood by until the scientists on Mars had thoroughly learned to guide their globe—just as one man stays by while another learns to ride a bicycle, one might say.

The experiment was entirely successful in every way, and so great was the rejoicing among the inhabitants of Mars that a special air-ship was built; the earth was asked to meet it midway between the two spheres with one of her own air-vessels, and exchange a complete set of each other's literature, art, and music, and receive a set of resolutions of gratitude from Mars. This was done, and assurances of the greatest friendship were passed between the planets from two huge air-ships, which met many miles in mid air with an exchange of brilliant fireworks to indicate to the watchers on both planets that the meeting had been safely accomplished.

Then the serious work began—to protect the other planets of the solar system from being destroyed. Scientists from both Mars and the earth agreed that it would be absolutely necessary to make the long trip around the entire solar system and establish protective screens.

Elverson spent one half day in communication with Panorus, the greatest electrical genius on Mars, discussing this matter.

"What is aggravating," said Elverson, "is the fact that we shall have to make a trip around the solar system once every two years to reenforce it with screens, in order that Canopus cannot tumble one of our planets into the sun, and thereby destroy us also. This will be tremendously expensive and troublesome."

"Why," asked Panorus vigorously, "can't we go over to Canopus and make war on him until he promises to leave us alone or is conquered himself?"

Elverson whistled with amazement at the idea.

"Your words are more than a jest," he answered with sudden enthusiasm and conviction. "I believe we can do it."

CHAPTER VI

THE ETHEREAL WAR-PATH

THE difficulties of making a voyage of conquest toward Canopus were most stupendous, however, when Elverson talked the matter over with his fellow scientists. It was decided to let the matter rest till the earth had journeyed back to its orbit and some further effort was made by Canopus to throw another planet into the sun.

The farewell between the earth and Mars was a great public occasion on both planets. A great electrical display signal was arranged on both planets so that all the people on the earth and Mars, on the hemispheres facing each other, could

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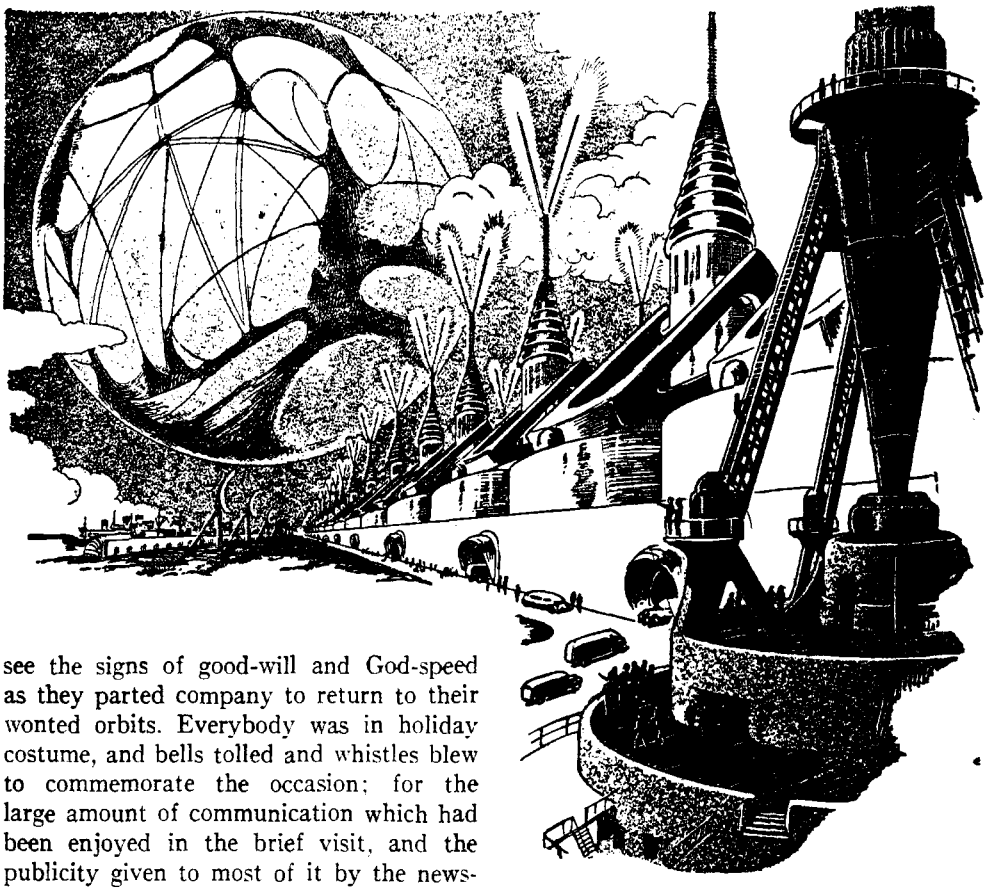

Elverson from his office in the New York tower controlled the movements of the two planets

see the signs of good-will and God-speed as they parted company to return to their wonted orbits. Everybody was in holiday costume, and bells tolled and whistles blew to commemorate the occasion; for the large amount of communication which had been enjoyed in the brief visit, and the publicity given to most of it by the newspapers, had established even a popular bond of fellowship. With a pair of ordinary fieldglasses the electrical "bonfires" could be seen on Mars; and thousands of people watched the Martian signals.

Within twenty-five days the earth was again back in its orbit, which was a gain of five days on the journey going. Elverson announced that he had found a way to hasten the earth's progress, and that he believed that he could make it travel as fast as a comet without danger.

He communicated his discovery to Panorus as soon as the earth was safely in his orbit and he could leave his "pilot's cabin," as the people called his office, and Panorus was enthusiastic.

"Good! It will remove one of the big obstacles to making a trip to Canopus," replied Panorus. "For the awful distance would take many years to travel. Now, let us both bring to bear on this problem all the knowledge we have, so that we will actually be able to attack Canopus on his own territory."

Elverson set to work enthusiastically with his eminent staff of scientists, all of whom were fascinated by the project of a conquest of the universe.

Meantime, a careful watch was kept upon all the other planets of our solar system, to note whether Canopus was endeavoring to throw them toward the sun. Nothing could be noticed to show this, however, and so in Elverson's laboratory the work went on, and many conferences were held between prominent astronomers and electricians.

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Elverson, stimulated by the great necessity and crisis, was showing positive genius in grappling with problems of a cosmic character. He astonished the electricians of Europe by proving the existence of a hitherto incomprehensible potential force in radium, and showed them how it could be applied in moving great bodies. He made a brilliant suggestion, also, as to the means of harnessing radium, without first having to concentrate it into its pure state.

The electricians were so roused by his discoveries that in one month's time they had practically applied Elverson's suggestion, and an incalculable amount of the force of radium was put to work without extracting it from the earth by the usual painfully slow and expensive process. Not only did this absolutely revolutionize the world's light and power problems, making it ridiculously cheap, but it also afforded a potentiality which would give the earth a practical independence of the sun for an indefinite number of years.

Meantime, Panorus on Mars was also enthusiastically at work. His efforts were being directed upon the problem of wireless high-power waves; in six weeks he reported that he had learned how to make an electrical wave strong enough to destroy a city at a distance of a hundred thousand miles. He said he had just begun to test the possibilities of it.

As fast as discoveries were made, either by the earth or Mars, there was the greatest frankness and willingness to tell all about them to each other, and mutual suggestions were freely made.

This keen scientific zest was immensely accelerated when the observatories announced that Saturn was being destroyed. First it was noticed that the rings were crumbling together.

Elverson was roused from his sleep one night, several weeks later, by a telegram from Yerkes Observatory, telling of the *explosion of Saturn,* and of the exceedingly great danger of being annihilated by colossal fragments, many of which, larger than the earth, were hurling themselves toward the planet at intense, dangerous speed.

Dressing hastily, he went to his little tower office, where he studied the situation, meanwhile calling Mars and telling the news.

"There are two large pieces speeding in the general direction of the earth, and they will strike within ten days if nothing is done," was the reply of the observatory to Elverson's inquiry.

Panorus did not seem alarmed.

"We need simply steer out of the path of the wreckage," he replied calmly. "But it settles one thing. We'll have to attack Canopus and fight out this battle to a finish. If you agree, Mars will start on the long journey with you tomorrow."

THE general public was told nothing about the narrow escape till the danger was past and the earth had gone and come twenty degrees from her orbit, and —so as perpetually to keep them away from the sun—magnetic action was brought to bear upon the huge masses of wreckage from poor Saturn, which hung in the eastern sky as large as moons.

This occurrence removed another great obstacle to making the trip toward Canopus, for so great was public confidence and gratitude toward Elverson and his associates that no objection was made to any slightest proposal. Elverson had been afraid that the people would revolt against taking the earth far out of its course and making an aggressive attack on Canopus, who was still greatly feared as an awful monster of unlimited resources; but when people looked at the several huge, dark masses of rock and lava in the sky, and understood that had it not been for Elverson they would have crashed into the earth and destroyed it, the thankfulness of the whole planet was his, and his counsel was heeded without opposition.

The time for action had come. Undoubtedly, Canopus was determined to destroy the solar system, partly for revenge upon the earth and partly for his own gain, whereby he might get metallic composition for his new sphere.

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In a few days Elverson asked Panorus on Mars to call a conference of representative scientists and citizens, with authority finally to decide the matter of making war on Canopus. Meanwhile, Elverson made a brief but startling announcement to the public and called for a conference. He stated:

The recent explosion of Saturn is the act of our enemy, Canopus, and we have averted the danger of collision, as well as the danger of solar disturbance. But we cannot always be keeping a defensive attitude toward our enemy, for if we allow him to continue his depredations he will make it very expensive and troublesome for us to be continually on our guard.

Therefore, it is the unanimous opinion of myself and staff, and the scientists on Mars, that the best way to protect ourselves is to *make a trip to the solar systems to which Canopus belongs, and fight the matter out.*

In cooperation with Mars we have in the past few months made great strides in scientific knowledge. We have learned how to get back the light and heat which the earth has absorbed from the sun; and how to use it so that we could be comfortable without the sun for several million years. We have discovered how to propel ourselves through space with an inexhaustible supply of energy, and guide the earth wherever we will. We have discovered how to make electric waves which will explode a planet at even greater distance than that at which Canopus exploded Saturn.

Furthermore, we have studied the situation psychologically as well, and we have come to the conclusion that Canopus is a single individual on the star of that name, and that he has not the support of his fellow beings in his greedy ambition for power.

We believe he is some hermit scientist who is using his power rapaciously, and that if we can get near enough to establish our own lines of communication, and get the help of Achernar, the star near Canopus, which has undoubtedly suffered at his hands, we shall be able to silence this monster of ambition, and common enemy of the universe.

If we go on this journey we can assure everybody on earth perfect safety, because our screens can resist as high a current as can probably be made, and as we carry our own atmosphere with us, and can regulate the temperature, no crops will suffer by the trip, and no inconvenience will be caused to anybody.

***In fact, we can make weather to order,* marvelous as that sounds, because we shall be away from the influence of the sun, and regulate our substitute for sunlight and heat at will, by vote. We sincerely trust everybody will see the benefits of making this trip in company with Mars for our mutual protection, and that no one shall object to starting on the journey in the next ten days.**

This announcement immediately was the subject for discussion everywhere. There were plenty of timid ones who were afraid to make the journey, but in the end the consensus of public opinion triumphed, and Elverson was duly authorized by all large governments to make the trip.

There was a great common holiday when on the 25th of June, when the earth was at the farther end of its elliptical orbit, the start was made out into unexplored, illimitable space.

What a contrast of but a few centuries, when the Vikings set out in their rude ships to conquer, to the day when the peoples of the earth, acting as one man, set out on a journey of a conquest of the universe! Poets wrote about the wonderful occasion, and the existence of a day of strife between earthly countries was quite unimaginable, so completely had this new common interest of self-protection united all races and nations of the earth.

As the anciently familiar sun became smaller and smaller, and the nearly perfect substitute for it was refracted upon the earth by Elverson's ingenious wave-distributors, the people were moved to many emotions—a few to downright fear. In one month's time the sun was very little larger than a ruddy evening star, and was fast lessening in size because of the truly wonderful speed at which Elverson was able to make the planet move.

Meanwhile, it was possible to regulate

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the temperature and atmospheric conditions exactly, and as a result some very remarkable crops were expected. During the summer the usual suffering by heat was utterly lacking, and Elverson contrived to please everybody with the weather by establishing a system of local weather control, decided by the vote of each State.

For five months the earth hurled itself through space, the astronomers enjoying an endlessly entertaining and instructive view of the stars as they came near to various solar systems which had never before been closely viewed. Alongside of the earth, like a huge moon, traveled Mars, and friendly messages were constantly being exchanged by the people of both planets.

The journey was not without its excitement.

CHAPTER VII

THE ATTACK OF THE STARS

THE course which Elverson and the astronomers had charted out was meant to avoid getting near the influence of other solar systems' attraction. After having safely traveled between the two stars of the second magnitude, Mirak and Almak, at a pretty close distance—and ascertaining that neither was inhabited—the journey was uneventful until the constellation of Taurus was reached.

Here was discovered the curious existence of a dark and cold nebula, forming the tail end of an exceedingly luminous and fiery one. As the earth and Mars approached this unprecedented phenomenon of the universe, there was widespread interest, for everybody had become a kind of amateur astronomer, eager for the curiosities of the mammoth sightseeing trip.

Suddenly, at this point a fiery mass was seen to shoot out from the luminous part of the nebula and make with great velocity toward the earth. An excited series of hurry calls were sent from the observatories to Elverson in his tower-room in New York, and the entire available force of dirigibility was used to swerve the planet away from the path of the comet. But it seemed bound to embrace the earth; and as the latter veered, it was soon seen to describe a beautiful curve, leaving a picturesque tail behind it.

Once more observatory messages advised Elverson, and again the earth moved away. Then the comet hesitated, shifted in another sharp curve, and made toward the earth's fellow traveler.

Fearful lest the danger was unnoticed, Elverson sent an alarm to Mars, which soon was dodging the unwelcome visitor. For a whole week both planets were kept busy in this game of tag, till it became very wearisome, and the people were alarmed. The victory was won by a desperate conference of Martian and terrestrial talent, and the comet was outwitted. By means of trigonometry, a series of "zigzags" was figured out, by which the earth and Mars traveled like boats tacking. Each turn placed an additional faction of distance between it and the comet, till it was finally out of range of attraction altogether.

A few weeks later they had a wonderful treat. The course of the journey lay very close to the broadest part of the always mysterious Milky Way, to avoid getting too close to the constellations of Orion and the Hare. Few people on the earth or Mars went to sleep on the first night, for the heavens were almost as radiant as day with the light of Aldebaran, Bellatrix, and Betelgeuse.

No mammoth tiara of diamonds or cluster of pearls could have been more beautiful. The stars were so thick that there was almost no perspective—the heavens were like a mighty tray of jewels, lavishly strewn, and almost totally obscuring the background. This beautiful night scene lasted for a week, and everybody—farmer, clerk and magnate—spent long hours watching the new majesty.

Then the course of the journey veered southward to avoid Orion and to get toward Achernar, which was the first objective point. A curve was made around

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Rigel, as a ship rounds a point of land.

Soon after this the battle began in earnest, and the earth was reminded of the grim danger of its journey.

At Elverson's order astronomers were carefully watching the position of the stars about them, to anticipate any action which Canopus might take to destroy the invading spheres. Hardly had Rigel been passed, when the astronomers reported that at least six stars of the third, fourth, and fifth magnitudes were shifting from their places, and were closing in from different directions.

A night and day watch was kept upon these stars, and twenty-four hours later the astronomers reported with grave alarm that a dozen other small stars and a lot of dead nebulæ were coming toward the earth at rapidly increasing pace.

Panorus suddenly called from Mars.

"What can we do?" he asked excitedly; "a hundred stars are dropping toward us from every possible direction, and collision with a single one means annihilation."

CHAPTER VIII

STELLAR ALLIES

UP IN the little tower-room a hurried conference was held. Wireless communication was also sought with all specialists and astronomers and the situation was gone over in detail.

Kale was plainly bereft of his nerve.

"Good Heavens, gentlemen," he said nervously, after a half-hour of grave conference, "what are you going to do? Those bodies are hurling themselves toward the earth at an incomprehensible speed. When they hit us, there won't be a dust speck left of us. And the people don't know a thing about their danger."

The little group of astronomers and physicists, however, paid small attention to him. With flushed faces and an intense light of determination in their eyes, they bent over the table, alternately studying the charts of the heavens and discussing with crisp vigor proposed methods. A messenger came at very frequent intervals from the adjoining room with helpful messages from Europe, and these were eagerly gone over; while Kale and several others trod up and down the narrow room with heavily knitted brows.

Suddenly Elverson brought down his fist upon the table.

"I think I've got it," he said. Everybody bent forward.

"First," turning to the wireless operator, "find out how near the falling stars are to us."

Within two minutes, for they had a direct connection, the nearest observatory replied: "Three stars of the third magnitude are within twenty-five hundred thousand miles, and are due to strike within seventy-two hours; while about forty other lesser stars are but three hours behind."

"Now, then," said Elverson enthusiastically, "call Mars and have her in readiness to work with us, and see if she can help us in any detail."

Then, turning to the assembled men: "You know that curious discovery made by Helmnitz several years ago, of how to reverse the polarity of attractive objects. I have in preparation a paper now which outlines my idea that the universe was originally formed through operation of this principle from one original nebula. I believe that the reversal of terrestrial attraction is electrically possible.

"Canopus, in the last twenty-four hours, has undoubtedly vastly increased the earth's attractive power by means of a system of teleo-inductive currents—else how could we attract so fiercely so many stars far larger in size?"

"Very good," said Bardi; "but how—"

"I'm coming to it," continued Elverson imperiously; *"all we need to do is to apply the Helmnitz reversal theory upon the earth itself. We have the huge generating machinery at our service this minute in this room; and we have the inductive power also at our command practically across the street. Do you see it?"*

"I begin to grasp it—" said Watres, the astronomer.

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"It won't cost much to apply it," said Elverson, touching the messenger-buttons and penciling an order to be sent to the wave-generating plant on the Jersey coast. "Won't you help me get enough wirers to rig out the system?"

Immediately everybody was on his feet, ready for action.

"Watres," said Elverson, with a graceful command of the situation, "will you not instruct Mars how to put this same system in operation? And Bardi, won't you see that Calcutta and this office has the proper equipment to operate the system?"

Immediately all were busy, and a force of one hundred men were started to work within two hours, and night and day work was done for thirty hours, arranging with the observatories to get very minute reports of the situation and action of the stars which were threatening to fall upon the earth and crush it.

Suddenly, however, the low-velocity waves being used were destroyed in exactly the same manner as they were when Canopus first addressed the earth.

"Hallo, Earth!" came the familiar call.

"Well," asked Elverson, going to the receiver, "this is Earth."

"Are you the individual whom I—Canopus—have addressed before?" asked the voice.

"I am," replied Elverson.

"Then," continued the Napoleon of the universe, "I want to tell you, if you don't already know it, that about seventy stars larger than yourself are tumbling in your direction at a pretty rapid gait, and that in about twelve of your hours more there will be no such a thing as the earth, nor any Mars—*no, not even a solar system.*"

"Indeed?" replied Elverson sarcastically. "It is most delightfully kind of you to give us this cheerful information. You are a paragon of courtesy."

"I have only this to say to you," continued the voice violently and harshly, "that if you want to surrender on the terms I first asked you, there is still time. I can stop the headlong flight of the stars in one hour. But if you *don't,* look out!"

"And I have only this to say to you," said Elverson peremptorily, "that if you don't stop them without our giving in to your terms, you are going to get a taste of your own medicine."

There was an angry muttering in reply, but that was all, and communication stopped.

One hour later, as Elverson was hastily taking his luncheon in his office, report came from the plant that the wiring was ready to be inspected and tested. Without waiting to finish the lunch, Elverson seized his overcoat and hat and sought the elevator-shaft to descend to the surface. He hastened to the sub-basement where whirred the huge converters and other appliances. Two hours were consumed minutely inspecting the system, which had been rigged up merely from rude pencil drafts, although very intricate work was required.

Hastening back to his office, he sought Calcutta on the wireless system. Calcutta had immediately been instructed to duplicate the New York plans of induction-charging the earth on its hemisphere side. He questioned them closely and was finally satisfied.

"Everything's all ready at Calcutta," said Elverson enthusiastically, as he closed communication with the plants on the other side of the earth, and turned to Bardi, who was in the office with him.

"Now, operator, get the observatories to report, and John, get an 'O.K.' on the preparations in Jersey at the generators and from the plant."

WHEN all was ready Elverson personally inspected the switch connections in the office. In a few moments a full "all ready" was given from the mechanical offices. The observatories told that the nearest stars were now but thirty hours off, and said that other stars, in addition to the four or five score which were already near, were being drawn out of their orbits.

Then Elverson, in full confidence of success, himself connected the high-voltage

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currents which were, by superior magnetizing power, to reverse the unnatural attraction which Canopus had given to the earth.

Having done this, he took some refreshments and retired to an anteroom for a rest. He did not wake up until a messenger sought him, four hours later, with the welcome news that the onrush of planets was actually being halted, and that his colleagues had made public the danger, which was now practically past, because of the alarm which had begun to be felt at the approach of so many stars.

"I knew it would work," replied Elverson simply to the newspaper men who came in large numbers to interview him about the scientific stroke he had accomplished. "We are a match for Canopus. He is working alone, very probably, without public support in his greedy aim. He will fail, and it is our business to make him fail."

The next month's journey was fairly uneventful. The stars which had come so perilously near receded rapidly, and finally assumed their wonted places. But Elverson was so pleased with the success of his induction reversal method that he decided to keep it connected and partially at work all the time, to avoid collision of any sort.

For a long time this interfered with communication with Mars in a mysterious way, but a method was found to neutralize the induction effect on certain classes of waves. For the first time since the current had been applied, Mars was heard from, reporting that it had followed out instructions carefully, but had not gotten the large amount of power prescribed. Nevertheless, no drifting of stars could be traced to Mars; and when a meter was devised to measure her attraction power, Mars was found to have accomplished all that was practically necessary to keep away other spheres.

It was now but a ten days' journey to Canopus, and Elverson began to work on his means of communication. The linguists who had succeeded in understanding the language of Mars in such a short time were again put in readiness for a similar task. An intensely high-frequency wave-generator was put in shape, and the sending and receiving apparatus was all carefully inspected.

When it seemed certain that the astronomers on Achernar must be noticing the coming of the earth, Elverson sent out messages toward the star, which was looming up with great intensity. What puzzled Elverson and the astronomers was that Achernar proved to be what they had long before supposed—a very fiery sun. Yet, when Canopus had said that he had no use for the civilization on Achernar, the inference was plain that there was life there of an intelligent kind.

When the fiery character of Achernar became certain, the astronomers announced the fact to the public, with the added opinion that Canopus was undoubtedly in the same gaseous state. The public was awe-stricken at this, and speculation as to what form of life could possibly live in such intense heat was very wide.

The heat increased as they drew near, and finally it was decided to stop. For some days no sign came in answer to the incessant signalling to the Achernarians; but, as the astronomers had suspected, this was due to the seat of intelligence being on the opposite hemisphere of the huge star. Hardly had the other hemisphere swung into position when there came what was unmistakably an answering signal.

There followed one month's baffling, puzzling attempt to analyze the sounds. They were unmodulated, harsh, and most incomprehensibly mechanical in sound. It was at first thought that it was a code from an instrument, and not a voice; but as the linguists progressed a trifle in interpreting it, they detected minute modulations, which proved them to be sounds issuing from an individual.

For three months the earth and Mars lay comparatively near Achernar in summer heat, which rendered unnecessary any artificial lighting and heating. Amazing

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crops of fantastically colored vegetables and fruits were raised. Apples were black when they ripened and cherries blue; beets yellow. Flowers grew into the most unhard-of combinations of color—all in tones of black, purple, dark blue.

But progress was undoubtedly being made, for Achernar understood our mission to be friendly, and grasped the meaning of certain sounds, while our linguists were able to understand half of what was said. They made rapid progress in getting the individual who spoke to them to teach them the other half and to comprehend the language of the earth.

NO ATTEMPT was made to discuss the situation till perfect communication was established between the spheres. When this time came there was a big stir of curiosity among the people, as well as among the people of Mars.

Elverson was the first to say one word to Achernar concerning the mission.

"We have come to interest you," he said, speaking very slowly and carefully, "in joining us in compelling Canopus to cease his persecution of yourself and ourselves and the entire universe. Has he persecuted you also?"

The answer came:

"He has demanded a tribute of certain metals which are precious here, and is now waiting until we collect it for him. We tried to resist him, but he caused gaseous explosions to kill a great many of us, and we had to surrender. I believe our people would be willing to do anything to outwit him."

"Get your people to act on the matter of joining us in a crusade against him at once," replied Elverson. "Meanwhile, get a corps of your best engineers and electricians to be ready to take instructions from us in how to navigate your sphere and how to establish a screen which will defend you against an enemy's electric currents. First, however, we must know about your temperature and electrical conditions."

This interesting process of discovering a totally new kind of humanity and civilization was keenly watched by everybody. It took a little time until mutual attempts of the earth and Achernar to explain each other and describe conditions about them could be comprehended.

Then it was learned that the new people were of vaporous, gaseous composition, startlingly like what we have been in the habit of calling ghosts! Yet this was perfectly consistent, scientifically, with the known nature of Achernar, on which everything was still in an intensely heated, vaporous stage.

These Achernarians lived only on certain portions of their sphere, which were not in an absolutely eruptive stage. They were acquainted with electricity and many other natural forces, and were far ahead of the earth or Mars in their understanding of gases, heat, and elemental matter.

They had government, law, and institutions of a high order. Their individual shape was a matter which greatly puzzled Elverson, because he could not make them understand what such a thing was for a long time. Finally he was able to gather that they had no absolutely permanent shape, but that their form was tenuous and ductile, yet individually cohesive.

As to questions of nourishment, propagation, and senses, the Achernarians could not possibly be made to understand what such things meant. They were, therefore, regarded as a most tantalizing mystery. Elverson said he could only guess that they were inorganic masses of atoms with an individuality and a power of reflection and thought.

The crisis of the trip had now been reached, and the march to Canopus was begun at the earliest moment.

Like a great general studying a battle, Elverson watched the campaign at every point; yet no general in any army ever had his mammoth responsibility.

Not thousands, but billions of lives, and the fate of worlds, not nations, hung upon his generalship.

Small wonder, then, that he looked thin and overworked and absorbed, with

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nervous cushions showing under his eyes.

Would the next few weeks mean a great triumph or—horrible annihilation?

CHAPTER IX

THE HEAVENLY BATTLE-FIELD

BY CAREFULLY noting the times at which Canopus had communicated with the earth, and figuring with his astronomers the probable diurnal motion of Canopus, Elverson felt certain that the individual who was endeavoring to rule the universe was operating from the *southern* hemisphere of his world.

Therefore, in order to conceal his march from the observation of the grasping Napoleon, the attacking general waited till his calculations told him that the southern hemisphere of Canopus was turned away; then signaled Achernar and Mars to start at the best possible speed. He figured the individual on Canopus as acting entirely alone, without help, or even perhaps the knowledge of his fellow citizens, and that he had no one watching the heavens from the northern hemisphere.

Within twenty-one hours all three of the invading spheres were so near to it that the temperatures began to rise, and the light from Canopus was perceptible. For six more hours the march went on. The earth and Mars now stopped artificial lighting and heating altogether, and basked in the influence of Achernar and Canopus.

Suddenly there came a message of distress from Mars.

"Something's got to be done," said the voice of Panorus excitedly. "Our volcanoes are spitting fire and lava, and there have been two heavy earthquakes. As far as we can comprehend it, a very subtle wave of electricity has penetrated our screen. Our meters on our whole southern hemisphere are in a state of disturbance."

"That settles it, then," replied Elverson; "we'll have to attract that wave and analyze it and divert it. Get your electricians on the wire and tell them to get ready for heavy work. I'll tell them how to go at the work."

But hardly had he finished telling the Martian electricians how to divert the destructive wave from Canopus, when alarming reports came from the Mediterranean. Volcanoes were in action and a terrific African earthquake was reported. Quickly he got into communication with the Calcutta plant, on the other hemisphere, which was at that moment exposed toward Canopus, and gave them the same instructions he had given Mars.

Immediately on finishing this, he instructed the New Jersey men at the plant to rig up a specially planned attracting contrivance. In ten hours, just as soon as Canopus was in direct line with New York and the western hemisphere of the earth, reports came from the coast plant that a frightfully powerful current was operating through the magnetic "pool" which had been constructed to trap the deadly force sent from Canopus.

Elverson quickly got on a train and went there, together with Bardi and Watres. Inside of the colossal foundry-shed, in an abandoned engine-pit of huge size, was the temporary holder which Elverson's ingenuity had contrived. On the dial of the meter in front of it was a curious sight. The finger had jammed against the pin which marked the highest figure the meter could record, and was almost bent double, so intense was the electrical action.

"It's a new electrical wave on me," said Bardi despairingly, after an hour's gingerly test; "I don't know what to make of it."

Elverson was fascinated at the opportunity to discover the nature of the new wave, and experimented with it far into the night. The next morning, when the reporters sought a statement, he said triumphantly:

"We've won again! Canopus tried the same thing that succeeded so well with poor Saturn—a power-wave which induces incandescence at centers of gravity, and thereby explodes the planet it reaches. Fortunately, we have been able to intercept it—and, now—what do you think?

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"Last night I discovered that it will drive motors, and can be transmitted any distance by a wireless system.

"In other words, we can run a great many of our factories and plants by free power as long as Canopus is kind enough to continue sending the current."

All the earth and Mars laughed at this transformation of the enemy's force, and lauded Elverson; but he and his staff went to work in great earnest, for the hardest work was still before them.

The first thing was to use part of Canopus's own current to help strengthen the screen shutting off harmful currents, which, owing to the increased proximity of the hostile sphere, had not proved quite strong enough. With the knowledge gained from Canopus's current, Bardi succeeded in planning for the entrance *only* of a low-power telephone current from Canopus through our defensive screen.

By this time the three worlds were as close to Canopus as was both advisable and convenient, and the hemisphere on which Canopus operated was now fully facing them. Elverson slept in his tower, with operators on duty all night, and was ready for any emergency. But Canopus spun round again, putting her greedy inhabitant out of sight on the other hemisphere, without anything happening.

Immediately Elverson started vigorously to work on his plan of campaign. He set communication by long-distance wireless to work toward Canopus from four different directions, and kept everything ready to repeat the slow but certain process of establishing communication with some one on Canopus besides the individual who had heretofore done all the talking.

He gaged the distance and the current to a nicety, so that the message should reach the inhabitants of the northern hemisphere of Canopus only, and not the ambitious Napoleon on the southern hemisphere.

FOR a month this was done as regularly as the northern hemisphere made its appearance—all to no result. Then Elverson suddenly tried an altogether new current.

One day the familiar voice of the inhabitant of the southern hemisphere cut into the wireless system of the earth.

"I'll give you ten days to get back to your orbits," it said in a terribly pugnacious voice. *"If you don't do so, I will let loose a force upon you which will never give you time to know what has happened to you."*

"Good morning, Canopus," said Elverson, after arriving at the tower. "What can we do for you?"

"I demand that you immediately leave this neighborhood and return to your orbits, or I will totally destroy you in a way you have not dreamed of."

"Brave words," replied Elverson. "But haven't you said things like this before? Now, see here, whoever you are. We are not children, and I warn you in turn that we are determined to put you where such a dangerous criminal of the universe belongs—out of range of harm.

"Don't you suppose I know that if you could kill us off so quickly as you threaten, you'd have done it long ago?"

Once more there was an angry exclamation, and communication ceased.

Elverson made efforts to get his signals noticed, and finally came to the conclusion that Canopus had made a screen to keep off all communication-waves from his sphere. Therefore, the plan was to break through the screen and reach the other inhabitants of Canopus. He consulted Panorus, but could get no help, and then he went to Achernar for consultation.

To his astonishment, Achernar solved the difficulty. Being much of the same kind of a star as Canopus, the electricians of Achernar knew just how the signals which Elverson first sent to them would act on the Canopians, and they suggested the use of waves having the power of incandescence at the other end.

Once more communication was tried, and within ten hours an answer was forthcoming from Canopus. The long, tedious

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work of making each other's language intelligible was next begun.

In the middle of it, however, there came a sudden interruption; and Elverson, immediately surmising that the malicious individual on Canopus was endeavoring to destroy communication, put into action his reserve plan—of suddenly adding pressure to the current.

This destroyed the enemy's current, and communication went along well for another week, when again the same interruption happened.

Elverson smiled, for he had expected just this, and he turned on still more reserve strength. He shrewdly guessed that the enemy, working alone, could not command the mechanical resources which he could. There were no more interruptions.

SIX weeks from this time actual and perfect communication was possible, and when the linguists turned over the apparatus to Elverson and his assistant, they merely continuing to act as interpreters.

After exchanging courtesies, Elverson broached his mission to the scientist who was speaking from Canopus.

"For over a year we have been threatened by some one on your planet—situated on your southern hemisphere," he said. "He told us that he wanted all the gold on our planet, or else he would plunge our whole solar system into the sun. We were forced by sheer necessity to either invent some means of resistance or else revolutionize our society by complying."

He told him all that had happened.

"We are addressing you to ask that you locate your rapacious and ambitiously destructive inhabitant and stop him from transgressing on the rights of other spheres."

The voice from Canopus expressed astonishment.

"I do not know that any one knows anything about such an individual or such threats," it said.

"Exactly," replied Elverson. "That is just what I thought. Now, I should ask that you bring the matter before the public and the proper government."

A month later, not hearing anything more, Elverson once more called Canopus, and finally got an answer.

"We are still searching," said the voice, but not with any great display of interest.

Two more months passed, and still there was no word from Canopus. Mars as well as Achernar, and even the people of the earth became impatient. The novelty of the trip was wearing off, and the strange and odd colors of the artificial light and heat were losing their charm. The people were longing to get back to the sun again.

CHAPTER X

WORLD-PEACE

WHEN this feeling rose to considerable height, and Elverson began to be criticized, he determined to take decisive steps.

Calling up Mars, he gave some mechanical directions, and then set a large force to work on new apparatus at the power plant in Jersey.

Then, calling Canopus, he said:

"In plain words: Unless your inhabitants wake up and can guarantee that no more destructive efforts shall come from any one on your world, we will take measures to destroy *your* sphere. We will give you one month more to report."

"Very well," was the reply.

It was only ten days after this that astronomers who were watching the heavens reported that Canopus was moving out of her place toward the group of three.

Bardi sought out Elverson with the news, wearing a rather apprehensive look.

"Do not be alarmed," said Elverson cheerfully. "Do you not suppose I have figured on the possibility of Canopus being able also to manipulate his sphere? I am beginning to suspect that the man we have been talking to was either our enemy or some one acting for him, cutting in upon our line of communication."

He got into communication with Acher-

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nar, who was getting somewhat scared as Canopus approached.

"His plan," he said, "is undoubtedly to force us away before him by reversed attraction. Now, the thing to do is to send in very strong power-waves, with power of incandescence; for the reversed attraction makes an easy path for the current, and he is probably using all his available generating power for reversing his current."

Accordingly, Mars, Achernar, and the earth, when all was ready, combinedly directed the strongest possible power-waves upon Canopus, while the astronomers watched for evidences of internal eruption. On the sixth day they reported a mammoth gaseous explosion, and observed sheets of flames rising from its aura, far out into distance. Within six hours after this another occurred on the opposite side, and ten hours later Canopus ceased to move away from its orbit and sought safety in retreat.

It was then that a call for Canopus was received on the wireless system. At first, Elverson thought it was the enemy, but the voice was different.

"What is the purpose of this persecution?" it asked. "Why have we not been able to talk to you all these months after you spent so long teaching us how?"

Elverson was astonished.

"Talk to you!" he exclaimed. "Why, we have endeavored for four months to get something definite from you."

Then Elverson told what had happened since that day, and his hearer said:

"The public is blaming me for the awful calamities which have been happening, thinking that I did not properly negotiate with you. I will promise you at once that if you will cease disturbing this sphere that we will discover the individual to whom you refer within two of your weeks, and either kill or imprison him."

"That is talking business," replied Elverson. "Just one thing more—say this word when you again address me, so that I will know I am not speaking to a spurious person—*'Lincoln.'*"

Canopus repeated the word, and then Elverson waited, confident that surrender was at hand. Within ten days Canopus signaled.

"Lincoln," began the voice; "will you not kindly bear with us for but a short time? We have located the mechanical genius who has been persecuting your solar system.

"He is a man who was once a foremost scientist and astronomer here, and who was understood to have become insane. Nobody knew what had become of him. He lives in a little city far out on a very far distant island, with several thousand people who work his mills and laboratories for him. He is greatly feared by them, because of his wizard-like power and his control over destructive forces.

"None of his people and workmen know the purpose of his machinery and works, and do not question, because he has always paid them promptly. The city is surrounded by a huge wall, patrolled by sentries, and no one is ever allowed to go out. A refugee who escaped tells wild tales of how trips by space-ships were made to far-off planets and stars, bringing back large quantities of gold.

"This genius vows that he is more powerful than any deity, and kills those who offend him in a startling manner—reducing them to a thimbleful of ashes in an instant.

"We have attempted to storm the fortified city, but have not yet succeeded in capturing it, for he destroyed three thousand of our men in a flash like lightning —But wait! Here is a messenger.

"He is captured!"

"Hurrah!" cried Elverson in Esperanto. "Let me touch the wireless key on my desk a moment and send the news all over the earth and to Mars.

"There! Everybody is rejoicing, and all we desire now is to make a universal treaty of peace with you, and exchange knowledge.

"Then we shall go back to our solar system—for we are a home-loving people, and the clash of battle has no attraction for us. Thank you. Good-by!"

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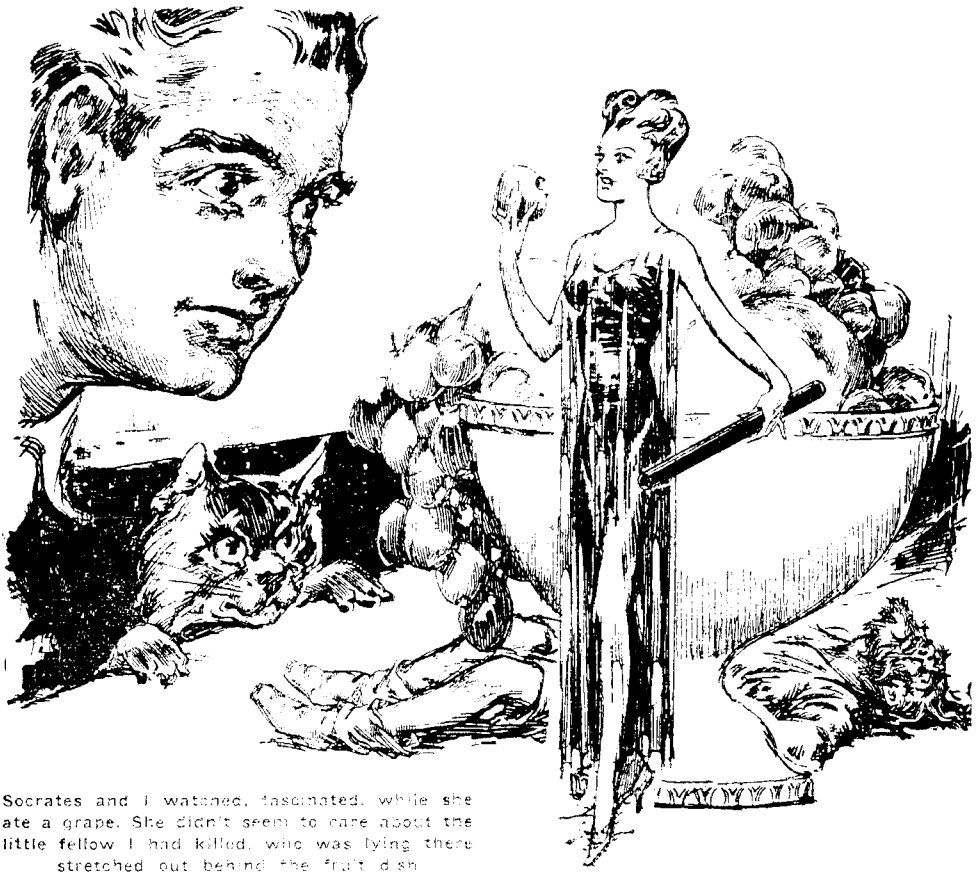

Socrates and I watched, fascinated, while she ate a grape. She didn't seem to care about the little fellow I had killed, who was lying there stretched out behind the fruit dish

Bomb from Beranga

By HARRY WALTON

A princess of a strange race of dwarfs takes an astounding journey through space for the sake of her harassed people

THE police don't believe me, so they keep me locked up while they hunt for Peter Delaney Forbes, whom I have told them all along they will never find. The fellow who says he is my lawyer says they will have to let me go unless they can find the *corpus delicti*—he means my boss, Peter Forbes. But I don't want people to think I am just a killer who is getting away free, so I am telling this story for the papers to print.

Of course the cops think I killed him, and every time I talk about the Princess or tell them where the Boss is right now, they look like I might become violent if not watched. It is true that I was the last man to see the Boss, but not the way they think.

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We were pals, sort of—maybe because we were different enough to go well together, like ham and eggs. He never acted like I was just a dumb chauffeur, but would have me explain about twin ignition and down draft carburetors, and then quietly go inside and write a paper on the "Thermodynamics of Internal Combustion Engines" for the engineering magazines. That was his business, designing engines. I just drive them, and tinker.

He wasn't married, and I did the cooking and the little housekeeping necessary for the two of us in the cottage where we lived most of the year. This cottage is a pretty lonely place — as lonely as you'll find in all New Jersey, I guess—but it suited us fine. The nearest other house was half a mile away, and no town or trolley or bus line nearer than three miles.

He'd work all day, usually, and at night we'd play chess. He taught me the game, and I got to like it after I caught on. Sometimes we'd play into the small hours, like we were doing that night two months ago when the thing happened. You bet that was one game we never finished.

It was very quiet, with moonlight coming brightly through the big French windows in the study, where we always played. I would be glad to show anybody this same window, in which the glass is still missing because we never did get around to putting in a new pane, only they will not let me out of here yet because they cannot find Peter D.

I had just taken a knight away from him and said "check" when there came a noisy crackling, like the magnified noise of a log fire I once heard on the radio. We both jumped and the Boss' hand froze in midair over his king, which he would have had to move but never did. Suddenly the light on the table turned red as a traffic signal. Our lamp was still burning, but the red glow was brighter by far. Everything for a yard around burned with it, where before had been only a silvery bit of moonlight and the yellow glow of the lamp.

Then we saw that it was streaking in some kind of through the window, a solid red beam two feet thick slanting down. It must have come from something thousands of feet up, but all we could see was the red ray dissolving into moonlight high up. It wasn't moving, as it should have been if it came from a plane. And the crackling had swollen to a roar that kept getting higher in pitch like a monster siren.

Then, suddenly, we *felt* it—an uncomfortable sort of push where the red light splashed over us. We jumped up and got out of range, and every chessman on the board keeled over and lay solid as if pinned down. I stuck my hand out to put it under that light—that is, I tried to.

Well, it couldn't be done. That red beam was like live rubber. There was a give to it, as if it had a thick elastic skin around it, but it shoved back my hand. The higher the roar went, the harder the ray became. The Boss took a poker from the fireplace and struck with it.

The thing bounced from his hands as though he'd hit a solidly inflated tire. That noise was a scream by now that set our nerves on edge. You felt it could only end in an explosion. And it *smelled*. The Boss said it was ozone, but it was also other things, because the varnish on our table was blistering with heat.

Suddenly he grabbed me and pointed out the window. Down the beam was sliding something round and shiny—a crimson bull's-eye from which the ray flashed forth. We had just time to jump aside when it crashed through the window.

It landed amid a jingle of broken glass squarely on the big oak table. Instantly the noise stopped. You felt your ear drums pop with the sudden quiet.

The thing looked like a shell from a monster gun. About three feet through at its thickest part, it tapered at both ends of its seven-foot length and was smooth as an egg all over. It was of metal, and hot, for the air danced above it, and there was a hot, oily smell about it. In each end was a twelve-inch disk of heavy glass or quartz, now black, which the red beam must have

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"Looks like somebody took a pot shot at the moon and missed," I said.

But the Boss remarked that he didn't know of any moon rockets being sent up, and anyhow a rocket would have had to land by parachute.

"This may be some kind of new shell. From the way it lit, it seemed to be under control right along."

A radio controlled shell! That made me shiver, for we had it right in our laps, you might say. But who would want to blow us up?

WE WALKED around the thing for the fifth time, and suddenly the Boss let out a yell. I came running to see an eighteen-inch disk that had been flush with the rest of it turning around like a big crankcase plug. You could see the threads on it.

With a click, the whole piece swung outward on a hidden hinge. From the opening streamed a rosy light. But before either of us could get a glance inside, something alive and kicking rolled out on the table. It is very hard for me to say what this was because everybody right away thinks out loud that I am an awful liar.

There were two of them — two tiny struggling human figures about a foot high—and one of them was a woman. For a moment the Boss and I were too shocked to move, although the two of them, the man and the woman, were tussling desperately. We didn't dream how desperately until the man managed to pull a long, shiny needle with a yellow point from a scabbard at his belt. It looked dangerous, small as it was. I was nearer than the Boss, and I reached out and grabbed this little fellow gently by the waist.

He twisted sidewise, his bearded little face full of hate, and jabbed that sharp sword of his half an inch into the base of my thumb. It hurt hellishly—so hard my hand jerked tight with the pain of it. There was a sharp crack, and the tiny man went limp in my hand. I stared at him, chills racing down my back, afraid to look up from that broken little body.

I knew somehow that *she* was watching me. When I couldn't stand it any more I did look up. And at the sight of her I forgot for the moment all about the tiny human thing I'd killed.

She was more fairy than woman, a wee queenly figure about twelve inches high that seemed carved out of warm pink marble, with life flowing through it. A single snug-fitting piece of clothing she wore, and crystal sandals on her feet that didn't hide their perfection at all. Hair red with the red of flame was piled high on her proud little head. Yes, and pride flashed from the deep green eyes of her, and they were the eyes of a queen.

So bewitching she was that I couldn't move just then to save my life, although she'd snapped out a thin black tube and had it pointed at my head. This, I thought, was the end of Jimmy Dorn. And even then I couldn't stop drinking in the wonder of her.

But something told me to come closer, told me just as clearly as if the Boss had said so, except that there hadn't been a sound, but only the thought burning itself into my brain. In the same way I knew that the wound in my thumb was poisoned, that I should put my hand out and wait.

I put my big paw eight inches from her face. She turned right around and went back into her ship. The Boss drew a loud breath as though afraid she had left for good. I felt pretty silly for acting as I had, but the jab in my thumb wasn't silly. It pounded like a steam hammer, and it was swollen and greenish for an inch around.

She was back in a second, with another tube that had a glass bulb on it. This she held to my thumb, and a yellow glow bathed the spot. In a few seconds she shut it off. The skin was normal in color again, there wasn't a sign of the jab, and all I could feel was a comfortable warmth.

The Boss didn't enjoy being left out of things at all. I could see he was impatient to ask questions, but didn't know how to

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begin. However, she had two of the little black tubes now, one pointed at each of us.

"I have long been hungry. Bring me food, if you can."

The Boss and I looked at each other, and we knew somehow that we had both received the same message. As cook, it was up to me. I went to the kitchen wondering what kind of eatable we had for a twelve-inch fairy. Finally I went back with a whisky glass full of milk, a few seedless grapes and some exploded rice grains.

She took the whisky glass in both hands—it was big as her head—and drank. She ate the rice grains one by one. It was the grapes she liked best of all. She managed to eat four of them, while we stood watching her and the little fellow I had killed lay at her feet. She was hungry, but she ate with dignity, as proudly as though we were servants waiting on her table.

She was finishing the grapes when Socrates jumped up on the table. He was our tomcat, big and good-natured usually. But now he landed spraddle-legged, every hair on his back bristling. Snarling and spitting, he tensed low for a jump.

All this happened so fast the Boss and I couldn't move. The tom came closer, tail twitching, but the Princess never budged, although he was easily twice her bulk and more. It was then, I think, that I first thought of her as the Princess. You see, she acted like one.

It was all over in a second—Socrates gathering himself for the jump, claws stretched and ready—the Princess taking something in her hand, and throwing it at the tom.

We saw it sink into his fur. At once a noise began, a queer rippling shake of sound that wasn't pleasant. It was the nastiest noise I've ever heard. It jarred your teeth and made something deep inside your head ache.

The poor tomcat jumped to the floor when the thing hit him, and tried to tie himself into knots. He acted as though twenty rats were nipping him. In thirty seconds the noise and Socrates stopped together. He was limp as jelly when I picked him up. He felt to me as though every bone in him had been pounded to powder.

I was sorry about Socrates, and I guess the Princess saw it. She put the black thought-tube on me again and ordered me to lay him on the table. Then she got out the tube she'd used on my thumb. Its golden glow splashed over the tom. That dead pile of fur swelled out and took shape and began to breathe again.

In less than a minute Socrates stood up, yawning, and stretched out his neck for the Princess to scratch.

The Boss came to himself about the same time. He pointed to the little man I had killed, then to the healing tube. The Princess answered by means of the thought-gun.

"You may dispose of Karan. He came as a traitor, stole my food, and would have killed me had you not interfered. I shall not heal him."

So she settled the little fellow's fate. We thought it hard of her at the time, but later we learned that he deserved his death well enough.

"Now," she ordered, "you will teach me your language and make me a place to rest."

The Boss nodded at me, so while he stayed with her I fixed a sort of bed in a corner of the library, with a pillow for a mattress, a couple of pillow cases for sheets, and a wide silk scarf for cover. The matter of pillows stumped me until I thought of rolling a whole package of cotton wool loosely into a small towel. When I was done somebody said at my elbow, "Thank you."

It was the Princess, looking at the job with a woman's eyes. She stepped forward, pulled an edge here and there.

"It will do well. Tomorrow we can do better."

But I didn't go right away. I had a hunch I was curious about—or maybe it wasn't a hunch, but had come over along with other thoughts through the black tube.

"If you don't mind, Miss," I said, "I'd

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like to know what I ought to call you."

She drew herself up a full quarter inch.

"You may know," she said graciously. "I am the Princess Santhia del Vego y Beranga."

But after that I just called her Princess.

BEFORE we went to bed I told the Boss about my hunch being right, that she really was a Princess.

"She's more than that, Jim," he answered. "Do you know how she learned English? I wouldn't dare say I taught her. I simply read aloud a couple of chapters from Conrad, while she held that tube on me to get the meaning of it. She didn't forget a syllable."

And she never did. Of course she learned more of the language every day, but from the first we had no trouble making ourselves understood—although it wasn't always so easy for us to understand her ideas.

The Boss went to bed then, after I had promised to bury the little bearded man. I went back to the study, where he lay beside the little ship. But the moment I saw him those chills started coming back. It wasn't plain fear; it was horror and shame and an awful regret for what couldn't be undone. I felt I'd gladly give half my life if that little body could be brought back to life. I couldn't forget that I had killed him -a man smaller than a healthy baby.

Then I saw the tube with the glass bulb—the same tube the Princess had used on Socrates—hanging just inside the port. If ever I saw a dead cat, Socrates had been one. This tube had healed him, and could bring this—Karan, she had called him—back to life.

The Princess wouldn't like it, I knew. Nor would the Boss; I could see he didn't think much of any man, small or large, who would try to stab a woman with poisoned steel. But the Boss hadn't killed him, and I had. That was the difference. Not to bring him back to life seemed like killing him a second time.

I took Karan in one hand, and the tube, which was the size of a short fountain pen, in the other, and went out to the garage. I laid the tiny body carefully on the front cushion, where it couldn't slip off, opened the doors and drove the roadster out, heading for the state highway.

It didn't occur to me that there was more cruelty than kindness in what I was doing, that I was turning a tiny, almost helpless creature loose in an unfriendly world where his death would be only a matter of time. And I never dreamt that I was putting the Boss and the Princess in deadly danger. Maybe I was too concerned with my own remorse to think of much else. During all that twenty mile drive it seemed there was a reproachful little ghost riding with me.

Twenty miles, I figured, should be far enough. It seemed impossible for him to cover that distance on his own legs, let alone find his way through a strange countryside back to a house he had never seen.

There was a bump on the tube which I pushed. At once the healing glow appeared. I swept it over every inch of the tiny body. It wasn't long before he twitched, and I hardly knew whether to be afraid or glad; I guess I was a little of both. There was something ghostly about seeing him come back from the dead. I was sorry that I'd have to face him.

His eyes opened on me with the same hate burning in them, just as though he had never died at all. He reached for his sword, which I had taken care not to bring along. It was no use trying to talk to him, and although it was like carrying a scratching cat, I took him out of the car and ran back with him a few hundred feet. His sharp little teeth drew blood while I was doing it.

I dumped him in some brush twenty feet off the road, raced back to the car, and took off in second gear. He was an ugly little customer, this Karan. If I had known just how ugly, maybe I wouldn't have done all this.

It was only after I put the car away that I missed the healing tube. It must have been knocked out of the car when I

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was trying to pick him up, and knowing how heavy traffic was on that road I knew better than to waste time going back to look for it. The thing must have been splinters long before I missed it. I worried about it, but there just wasn't anything to be done.

To the Boss I explained the next day that I hadn't wanted to bury Karan on the place and had driven out a few miles with him instead. Also I lied and said that I'd knocked something out of the ship to the floor, where it had smashed. Luckily he didn't ask any questions. But he did warn me not to say a word about the Princess or her ship to anybody. I could see that made sense. Can you imagine a tribe of reporters mobbing her? They, or somebody else, would have managed to take her away from us. That was why we never told about the coming of the ship.

Now I became footman to the Princess, as well as chauffeur, butler, cook and valet. There were no more chess games. She and the Boss were always so interested in each other they would have forgotten to eat if I hadn't reminded them. I built a real bed for her, and a private swimming pool all of four feet across. She was a fine diver, but it was funny to see her stagger when she came out wet.

The Boss explained that the film of water clinging to her was much heavier in proportion to her own weight than it would be to ours, because her smaller body had a far greater surface area in proportion to its weight than our big ones. Besides that, he said, she already weighed more on earth than she would on her own world.

She made a harness for Socrates, the tomcat. They used to take long walks together, sometimes as far as the garage. Often he scared away other cats and dogs that thought the Princess might do for a light snack. Once they met a skunk and Socrates did his stuff. But he and the Princess weren't really thick for several days after that.

There was only one thing wrong with those weeks. The Boss worried me. When the Princess was around he was fine and the two of them had more fun than a couple of kids. But when she was out he'd mope, and all the work he got done on the thermodynamics of engines you could have put in your eye. And as I am not exactly a moron I figured it out that he liked her too much for his own good.

We'd been together for years, so one day I risked a punch in the nose and told him what I thought.

"Maybe you're right, Jim," he answered, surprising me. "Or let's be honest and say that you are right. I'm in love with her, Jim. Blame me if you can. It's stupid and impossible, but that's how it is. And there isn't a thing we can do."

Blame him? Not I. She was one hundred per cent woman, besides being the Princess. The real, living soul of her was as big as any man or woman that ever lived. And it knew things, and had sense, that we don't have yet—or if we have, we don't know it.

SOON she told us about Beranga, the world she came from, which is only about twice the size of our moon. Only the red ray, which turned red only when it traveled through air, could get a ship from Beranga to the earth. This red ray, which is invisible in airless space, travels much faster than ordinary light, which we usually think is the fastest thing in the universe.

But the ray isn't ordinary light. It doesn't travel in a straight line, but follows the space-time curve of the universe. It has alterable density and pressure so that a ship can settle down on it like on a long, adjustable shock absorber. The Boss could tell more about it if he were here, but I could never get much further than free wheeling and syncro-mesh and simple things like that, myself.

The Boss asked her how she could help hitting comets and asteroids and meteors when her ship was traveling at many times the speed of light. The red ray upset everything he knew about physics, and he just couldn't forget it.

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"I do not miss them," she answered, laughing. "I pass through them, or perhaps it would be fairer to say that they simply do not exist for me, nor I for them."

"But how is that?"

"Because of my speed. An object traveling at the speed of light has no dimension in the direction of its motion. Nothing in the three-dimensional world can move faster than light, because if anything does, it ceases to exist in three-dimensional space. At a speed seventy times as great as light I am a two-dimensional shadow. My speed warps space about me. I am a universe to myself and only objects moving as quickly as I can affect me at all."

"But life must seem awfully flat," I said, "when you're traveling that way."

"You forget that it is a relative flatness only," she answered seriously. "To me everything is normal. A yardstick in my ship measures exactly as well, for me, as though I were at rest with it, because the yardstick itself is shortened to nothingness. To myself all is normal, and it is the outside universe that seems to shrink, to dissolve in motion."

But to get back to Beranga, this little world has plenty of trouble for its size. Although it is all one country, under one government, there is a neighboring world a few million miles away, called Ulthio, that causes more grief than a barrelful of dictators. They aren't at war, and their people look alike and maintain regular liner service with each other, but there is enough politics to keep a Tammany ward boss busy a couple of lifetimes.

Beranga is a milder world, with fertile land and plenty of sunlight. Ulthio has rich mines, gas and oil wells, but it's a hard place to live because of earthquakes and heavy lightning storms. Worse still, Ulthio lies in the shadow of Beranga for five sixths of their common year. It's a cold, dark world, and the ambition of every Ulthian is to leave it and go to Beranga. By now the Princess' world has almost as many Ulthians as native Berangans.

Finally Beranga passed strict immigration laws, which Ulthio didn't like at all. There were even enough Ulthians to make the passing of the law a tough problem. But it was passed and enforced, until the death of the emperor, the Princess' father.

"And I believe that Karan was responsible for my father's full death," she told us. "Karan was a second generation Ulthian—that is, his father had emigrated from Ulthio to Beranga. Karan had much power with his clansmen, and caused much trouble."

"Why do you say 'full death'?" asked the Boss.

She looked puzzled. "Because you have no proper word for it in your language. It might be called the final death. If a Berangan is killed, he may be restored to life once by the Vitalizer, just as Socrates was. This instrument captures the healthy thought concept of the patient's body, amplifies it, and atomically rebuilds the body structure. It is a power of the mind which first only a few of our greatest men possessed, until it was found that the healthy thought pattern persisted, as an ideal, even in the human mind which had accepted the death of its body.

"Our population is almost immortal, which is another reason why there is no longer room for more Ulthians. Had my father perished in an ordinary accident, he would be living today. But his airship exploded mysteriously at a great height, so that his body was utterly destroyed."

Right then I was glad that the Princess was not using her thought-tubes any longer, because I remembered how I had brought Karan back to life against her wishes. But I was pretty sure that the little man must have died by now, being defenseless in a world where every cat or dog was bigger than he.

"AND who reigns in Beranga now?" asked the Boss gently.

The Princess looked at him with a queer wistful glance. "Beranga has a government, but no ruler for the present. A—a woman may not rule unless she is wed.

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Treachery and betrayal are so common, even in my court, that I have delayed choosing a man of my own people to make emperor. Instead I journeyed into space, not knowing that Karan was aboard my ship and hoped to force me to return with him as my consort.

"You think it strange for me to leave my world at such a time? Do you not believe that there are powers other than rays and physical energies, powers of the mind that guide us more surely than the calculations which speed our ships from universe to universe? I have been to young worlds, and old worlds, and dying worlds, and found no men, although life is fierce and strange on some of them. Yet I have not traveled altogether in vain."

And again there was that quick little glance which the Boss did not notice.

"I had a Zeta in which to search. If I do not return in that time Beranga becomes a popular government, which means that it will eventually fall to Ulthio."

I don't know how long a Zeta is, but she and the Boss figured out when she was due back. The upshot of their work was that the deadline had gone by a week ago, earth time.

"A week ago, Beranga became a rulerless world. I was declared dead or lost, and the throne forfeit. Even now Ulthio is probably forcing its representatives into places of power, and my world is about to become tributary to the Metal Masters."

That was what the Ulthians were sometimes called, because they made heavy machinery and metal goods. Of course what the Princess had said worried us, because it was plain that she had lost out at home.

"Then you must stay here, with us," the Boss told her. "You will be happy here, in your new world."

But she was grinning like a little girl who knows a secret. She spun the dial on the machine which was her calendar—a black metal thing more like a tiny adding machine—and then looked up at us.

"I am going back to Beranga and shall take my lawful place there. Karan's comrades shall be overcome. But I must leave in less than two weeks to return in time!"

"Two weeks? But you just told us that Beranga is already a democracy, that it is already too late—"

She raised a tiny hand, confident as a traffic cop.

"You forget that my ship departs the three-dimensional world, that it warps space about itself and therefore time as well. I wonder whether I can make you understand. If you on this world travel from west to east, you gain a day; but if you travel from east to west, you lose a day. So, although my time has already expired, yet I can leave within two weeks and return within the limit set. It is weird, but it is also true. In my ship I traverse not only space, but time as well. One cannot travel in a modern Berangan space ship without also traveling in time."

And then she told us a story about an early pilot who took out a ship driven by the red ray for a speed record. He arrived at his goal in five days by the ship's chronometers, set off a light signal, and returned to Beranga. But the astronomers who received the signal after he got back —light traveling far more slowly than he did—claimed it could have started out only six days after he left, and that his return trip took two days less than the outward one. He denied it and was called a liar, until the mathematicians proved him right.

You lost time, the Princess said, whenever you went away from Beranga, and gained it when going back. The Boss said it was because her ship was built along the space-time co-ordinates of Beranga, and that an earth ship would behave the same way with reference to the earth. I couldn't see it myself, but I guess it's so.

"But look here, Princess," I asked her, "how are you going back to rule Beranga without a husband? Didn't you say there weren't any people like yours anywhere else?"

"No," she said flatly. "I didn't."

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"But where the dickens?"

"Here!" she said. "Here are men like Berangans."

I laughed, and didn't notice at first that the Boss was cold sober.

"Only about thirty times the size of Berangans," I told the Princess, because at first it seemed kind of funny, her coming quadrillions of miles to find people like hers, only to come up against the question of size like that.

But that didn't seem to bother her. She cocked her little head sidewise and quoted out of one of the Boss' books she had been reading:

"'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'"

And by now after all that happened, I know she was right.

UP to this time things had gone along easily. The Boss hadn't done much work and we had hardly been to town except to buy grub, especially grapes for the Princess. But now things tightened up. They were together more than ever, and talked quietly for hours at a time. Nor did she sit on his inkwell while he wrote, as she used to. Instead, she brought things from her ship, and they drew queer plans and did much figuring. The Boss didn't talk much to me. Only once did I get an inkling of what was in his mind, and then I muffed it!

"Haven't you ever wondered, Jim, how she came to land her ship here, and nowhere else? She had the whole world to pick from, you know."

"Maybe that fellow, Karan, was bothering her," I said. "Besides, on account of him there wasn't any food left in the ship. She had to land, quick."

He took no notice of me. "Her people have mental powers which we lack, or have never developed. They have learned to use telepathy, even to communicating in a limited way with domestic animals. And the mating instinct is so well developed that divorce is unknown. A Berangan who is ready to marry knows intuitively where he may find a mate who thinks as he does, loves as he does, and is otherwise suited to him. Berangan scientists have traced a mental link between such persons which, theoretically, is unbounded by space. That's why she risked the voyage, Jim, even though her world faces a crisis."

I remembered then how I had laughed at her for finding people like hers only here, but on a much bigger scale. It made me feel bad to think about it.

The Boss looked at me queerly. First I thought he was going to say something more, but he turned away quietly. When I thought it all over I began to understand what he might have wanted to say. The Princess had come for *him!* That strange mental connection had drawn her here, but it hadn't made known to her the bodily differences that made it forever impossible for Peter Delaney Forbes to reach Beranga. It had brought them together only to show that they could never really belong to each other.

I began to notice in the mail I brought the Boss from town that much of it was from his brokers and his lawyer. Then I mailed several letters to an electrical manufacturing firm. Later I hauled some boxes from this same firm from the local freight office to the house.

The Boss really got excited then. He insisted that we unpack the boxes right away, and we did, with the Princess looking on as if she, at least, knew what it was all about. There were big black coils, some bright ones made of thick copper bars, and a set of complicated lenses like a giant magic lantern eye, and other things.

The Princess jumped off the hassock she used as a stool and started showing us how to put the things together. We worked right through into the early morning hours. I would hate to say what the result looked like, but the Boss seemed satisfied. As for the the Princess, I'd never seen her so happy. There seemed to be a rich warm fire glowing through her. Her smile would even have thawed Karan, I think.

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They both insisted that I go for some rest. But lying in bed wide awake, I heard them talking, excitedly, for a long time.

SOCRATES was missing the next day. He wasn't tagging after the Princess as usual. When I asked the Boss about it he grew red and said he hadn't seen the tom that day either. I wondered whether Socrates had become mean and been done away with—for good, this time.

The Boss sent me to town to mail some important letters. When I came back he was awfully excited. The Princess had her black calendar wheel out and was spinning it again and again, but that didn't seem to help.

"Jim," said the Boss, "we're in a spot. You've got to help us." He said it as if he were afraid I wouldn't. Of course I told him I would, but I wondered what was up.

"Those letters you just mailed, Jim, were to wind up my affairs for good. They included instructions to my lawyer to pay you a weekly salary, and my will leaves you this house if you want it. You understand?"

I didn't, but I nodded anyway, waiting to hear more.

"Good. Now listen, Jim. We've made a bad mistake in our calculations. The Princess has to leave tonight, before eleven thirty. It doesn't matter how we slipped up, but we did. She has to go tonight to get back to Beranga in time."

I was sorry to hear it. The Princess was fun, and darned lovable even if she did act every inch a Princess.

"And, Jim—I'm going with her." The Boss said it so quietly I first thought my ears had played me tricks. You just don't believe a thing like that right away. But that was what he'd said. I decided he was kidding.

"Going—in that?" I asked, pointing to the little seven-foot-long ship.

For answer the Boss swung open the door in its hull and looked inside.

"Socrates!" he called. "Come here."

The next moment Socrates stood in the doorway, stretching. It was our tom all right. He sniffed at my hand and then went to snuggle close to the Princess' legs. But he wasn't more than two inches high.

Then I understood. They had put Socrates through that mess of wires and lenses we had hooked up. But that had been only to test the thing.

The Boss sat down and began to write a note, leaving me to straighten out the kinks in my brain by myself. Because you can see the idea back of it all was a sock on the button. The Boss was going to Beranga, and to do it he was going to put himself through that machine. It wouldn't do any good to argue with him, I knew. In his place, I would have done the same. But it gave me the shivers to think about it. Then I had an idea. It gave me shivers, too, but it was a good idea.

"Boss," I told him, "I'm going, too."

"You are not," he answered without looking up. "You're staying here because somebody has to work the machine, and it has to be somebody of normal size. We were going to hook up automatic controllers, but there isn't time now. That's why you've got to help us, Jim. That's why only the two of us can go—the manual controls are too big for us to work, once reduced in size. I wish there were time to get another witness here, so that you won't get into trouble about my disappearance. But this release I've written should take care of that."

He signed the paper and gave it to me to read. It said that he was going away of his own free will, and that no search was to be made for him. It said nothing about the Princess or about Beranga, I guess because the Boss thought the truth would sound too much like a fairy tale.

I folded the paper and laid it on the table and watched the Boss adjust some tubes and lenses in the contraption we had built. He put a little brass statue back of the last lens and turned on a light. Against the wall appeared a picture of the statue, much smaller. He turned off the light and the picture disappeared.

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"Get the idea, Jim? When you see me there you'll pull up this switch, run the rheostat up slowly to the point marked, and finally pull that lever. Switch, rheostat, lever. Got it?"

I couldn't talk, but just nodded. The Boss stood behind the lens and had me turn on a light. His picture appeared against the wall, perfectly reduced to fourteen inches in height. It was like looking at him through the wrong end of a telescope.

I pulled the switch, and the light changed to deep orange. There was a humming in my ears that made me nervous. I shoved the rheostat handle around, and yanked the lever over.

Something flashed hot and bright, as when a fuse blows, and there was suddenly a sharp, biting smell in the air that you sometimes notice during lightning storms. The orange light flared green, and died—and I almost did, too, because the Boss, who had been standing grinning behind the big lens just a second before now slumped to the floor like a bundle of limp rags. I cursed the machine, and ran to him.

Somebody laughed behind me—laughed just like the Boss always did. I spun around, and there he was laughing at me from the other end of the room, where his little image had been. But now the image was real. What had slumped to the floor was his empty clothing. The lenses didn't transmit anything not alive. He was naked as a chick, and blushed from his ears down until we saw that the Princess, who no doubt knew what would happen, had gone into the ship.

Trust a woman, even a Princess, to be practical. We found a complete outfit of pint-sized clothing laid out ready right beside the ship. Maybe they had been Karan's, but I think she brought them along herself. Anyway, they fitted the Boss perfectly. He looked handsome, even if a bit outlandish, in a tight green jacket and copper-colored breeches that left his legs bare. There was a scabbard and a needle-sharp little sword in it, which he fastened at his hip.

WHEN the Princess came out of the ship he stood up proudly to his full height, and without a word marched over and took her in his arms, and she put her arms around him. It was their first embrace and they were in no hurry about it, this woman from another world and the man who was giving up his world for her. I looked away.

A lot of notions wouldn't stop running through my head. The Boss was doing what no man had ever done before—on earth, at least. It wasn't as if he were dying, but it meant, just as surely, that I was soon going to look at him, and shake his hand, for the last time.

A bellow of rage, more animal-like than human, jarred me out of those thoughts. I turned in time to see a tiny figure jump from the open window into the room. It was Karan, dirty and scratched and bloody, clothes slit to ribbons, but his fierce little eyes as full of hate as ever.

He must have found his way back through those strange mental powers which the Princess had told us both Berangans and Ulthians possessed, and which I hadn't dreamt of when I let him go alive. In his hand he had a sliver of steel that might once have been a knife blade, now ground thin and narrow to make him a sword, and it was tipped with yellow like the first sword I had taken from him.

He stood facing the Princess and the Boss, his face twisted in fury, for a second. Then, lightning quick, his left hand went to his waist, flashed back, and threw something at me. I dodged without thinking. The thing hit the wall behind me and at once started buzzing in a way to make your teeth grind with listening to it.

It was the same noise we'd heard when the tomcat was killed that first night. But it wasn't only noise; the wall was being eaten away around a spot where a little black dot clung. Paint and woodwork drifted down as a whitish powder until there was a patch a foot square and an inch deep eaten out of the wall. I shivered for thinking what the pill would do to a man.

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But Karan had forgotten me to clash with the Boss—blade to blade, metal clinking against metal as they went at it furiously, the Princess standing a little way off and watching—watching proudly, unafraid.

But I was scared. Karan was everywhere at once, jabbing and lunging as only an expert could. The Boss was awkward; again and again he got his blade up to protect himself only in the nick of time, and clumsily at that. He was no swordsman, and never would be if Karan got in a jab with that poison-dipped point. There was no healing tube to save the Boss if that happened, and that was my fault. It was my fault that Karan was here. I saw that I had to do something. I had to grab Karan before he touched the Boss with that poisoned steel. Karan would jab me with it, of course, but not before I cracked his ribs—for good this time.

The Boss saw me come, and yelled, and Karan took advantage of the moment. His sword sliced downward. The Boss' sword flew up to land quivering, point first, in the table top two feet away. Between it and the Boss stood Karan, grinning like a devil.

Fair play or not, I wasn't going to stand by any longer. My fighting code never did include poisoned steel. I went for Karan—and the Boss yelled at me again, and dove for Karan's knees.

He hit in a hard tackle that sent them both sprawling. The yellow-tipped sword clattered free and they rolled madly over, pausing now and then to strain face to face, tense as wound-up springs. I'll never forget the sight of those fourteen-inch men fighting for life on a table top, two men smaller than house cats but deadly as tigers.

I didn't try to interfere again. With the poisonous sword out of it, the fight was fair enough. Besides, I knew the Boss wanted me to keep out of it. This was his scrap. He was defending his Princess and he'd never have forgiven me for butting in.

Karan got a hand free and ripped a dagger from some hidden scabbard. The Boss caught his hand, but he was underneath now. The dagger came down steadily. Sweating blood there on the table, with that devil on top of him, the Boss did a desperate thing. He let go of the dagger hand to smash out for Karan's jaw, scarcely an inch from his own.

That fist connected with a beautiful little "crunch" and the dagger slipped out of Karan's fingers. He wasn't out—the blow had been too clumsy for a knockout. But the Boss got a breathing spell. He heaved Karan off and jumped to his feet scarcely an inch from the edge of the table. It was then the Princess screamed for the first time. Karan was up also now.

They clashed again, stood locked and swaying at the edge of what was to them a sixteen-foot drop to the hard floor. Karan got a grip on the Boss' throat. The Boss pounded his chest and face. Weaving like drunken men they stood up to each other, their footsteps always getting closer to that fatal edge. Karan saw the danger. He had to shift his hold to get away, and the Boss landed an uppercut on his jaw.

It lifted Karan like an elevator—lifted him and dropped him just the wrong side of the table edge. He screamed, crashed to the floor, and lay still.

The Boss backed away, leaned against the ship, gasping. I bent down to look at Karan. He wasn't breathing; he never would breathe again. His neck was broken.

THE Boss walked slowly to his sword, pulled it out of the table top, and pushed it into its scabbard. The Princess smiled at him proudly. I had to turn away again because after all this was only the second chance they had really had together.

I began to feel the heavy ticking of the old clock in the study. Its hands said eleven twenty-nine when the Boss finally called me. I blinked the fuzziness out of my eyes, and he grabbed my finger and squeezed it harder than I would have thought he could. The Princess took hold

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of my little finger, too, by way of farewell. Nobody said anything—I guess because there was nothing more to say. They walked into the ship arm in arm. Socrates went with them. After all, he would have led a hard life in a world where he was no bigger than a healthy mouse.

The door of the ship swung shut, turned around until it clicked to a stop. The study window was still broken, as it had been since the night the ship arrived; nothing stood between it and the free night sky.

The ray flared out, orange first, deepening to red, from the stern bull's-eye. The ship trembled, lifted an inch this way and an inch that. A roaring began, swelled deeper as the ship swung free off the table. Varnish blistered under the red ray, and the paper the Boss had given me, which I had left near the ship, was sizzled to cinders.

There was no way to tell him, and I didn't care anyway. Bow first the ship lifted higher, and slid swiftly upward. It was so sudden I hardly saw it go. When I ran to the window only the red ray was visible. Soon that was gone, too.

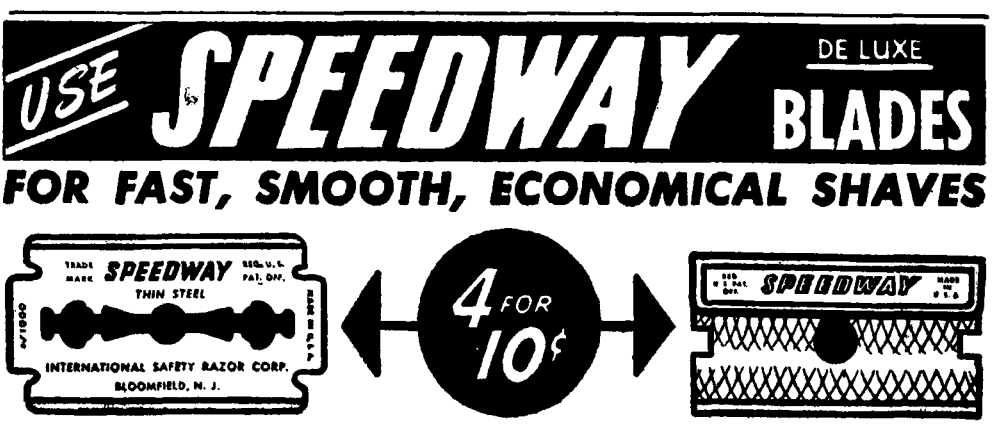
I picked up Karan and his sword and carried him to Loon Lake. I tied a rock to the body, stuck the sword into its scabbard, and threw him into the deepest pool. Then I walked back to the house.

I was sitting in front of that blistered table when neighbors came. They had seen the red ray this time—although when the ship had first arrived, that night in the wee hours, nobody had noticed it. First they asked me had there been a fire. Then somebody found the Boss' clothing and there was a lot of fuss and questions. They thought I'd done away with him. The paper the Boss had given me was just a heap of fluffy ash. When they couldn't make me talk they sent for the police.

The cops were worse. They kept me awake for hours, shaking the Boss' clothes at me, asking what I'd done with the body. Finally I told them the whole truth, but it didn't do a bit of good. They wouldn't even drag Loon Lake for Karan's body. By now I guess the fish have done for it. But my lawyer has talked to the Boss' lawyer and says I needn't worry, because there is plenty of evidence to show that the Boss was winding up his affairs for good, and plainly meant to go away.

That's the whole story—all I know, anyway. Sometimes I wonder how the Princess and the Boss made out on Beranga, and whether they arrived in time to keep the kingdom in the family.

But even if they didn't, I know the Boss will never be sorry he did what he did. As I saw it, when a Berangan princess gets her man, he's glad of it.



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The Conquest of the Moon Pool

By A. MERRITT

Part V

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CRIMSON SEA

I WAS in the heart of a rose petal, swinging, swinging; no, I was in a rosy dawn cloud, pendulous in space. Consciousness flooded me; in reality I was in the arms of one of the man frogs, carrying me as though I were a babe, and we were passing through some place suffused with glow enough like heart of pearl or dawn cloud to justify my awakening vagaries.

Just ahead walked Lakla in earnest talk with Rador, and content enough was I for a time to watch her. She had thrown off the metallic robes; her thick braids of golden brown with their flame glints of bronze were twined in a high coronal meshed in silken net of green; little clustering curls escaped from it, clinging to the nape of the proud white neck, shyly kissing it. From her shoulders fell a loose, sleeveless garment of shimmering green belted with a high golden girdle; skirt folds dropping barely below the knees.

She had cast aside her buskins, too, and the slender, high-arched feet were sandaled. She walked like one of Diana's nymphs, free, floating, delicately graceful, but with none of that serpent touch entwined in the least of Yolara's movements. Between the buckled edges of her kirtle I caught gleams of translucent ivory as exquisitely molded, as delectably rounded, as those revealed so naïvely beneath the hem.

Something was knocking at the doors of my consciousness—some tragic thing. What was it! Larry! Where was Larry? I remembered; raised my head abruptly; saw at my side another frogman carrying O'Keefe, and behind him Olaf, step instinct with grief, following like some faithful, wistful dog who has lost a loved master. Upon my movement the monster bearing me halted, looked down inquiringly, uttered a deep, booming note that held the quality of interrogation.

Lakla turned; the clear, golden eyes were sorrowful, the sweet mouth pale. But her loveliness, her gentleness, that undefinable synthesis of all her tender self that seemed always to circle her with an atmosphere of lucid normality, lulled my panic. She spoke, and her words were as reassuringly matter of fact as though chosen for that purpose.

"Does your head pain you much?" she asked.

I lifted it gingerly; beyond a slight soreness there seemed little amiss.

"Drink this," she commanded, holding a small vial to my lips.

A new adventure of Dr. Goodwin, the scientist, young Larry O'Keefe, and Olaf Huldricksson. They are on their way to the shores of the Crimson Sea, watched over by Lakla, the handmaiden of the Silent Ones. Can the adventurers still hope to save the captives of the Shining One? And can they save the world outside from the evil forces of the mysterious Moon Pool, loosed by their enemy, Von Hetzdorp?

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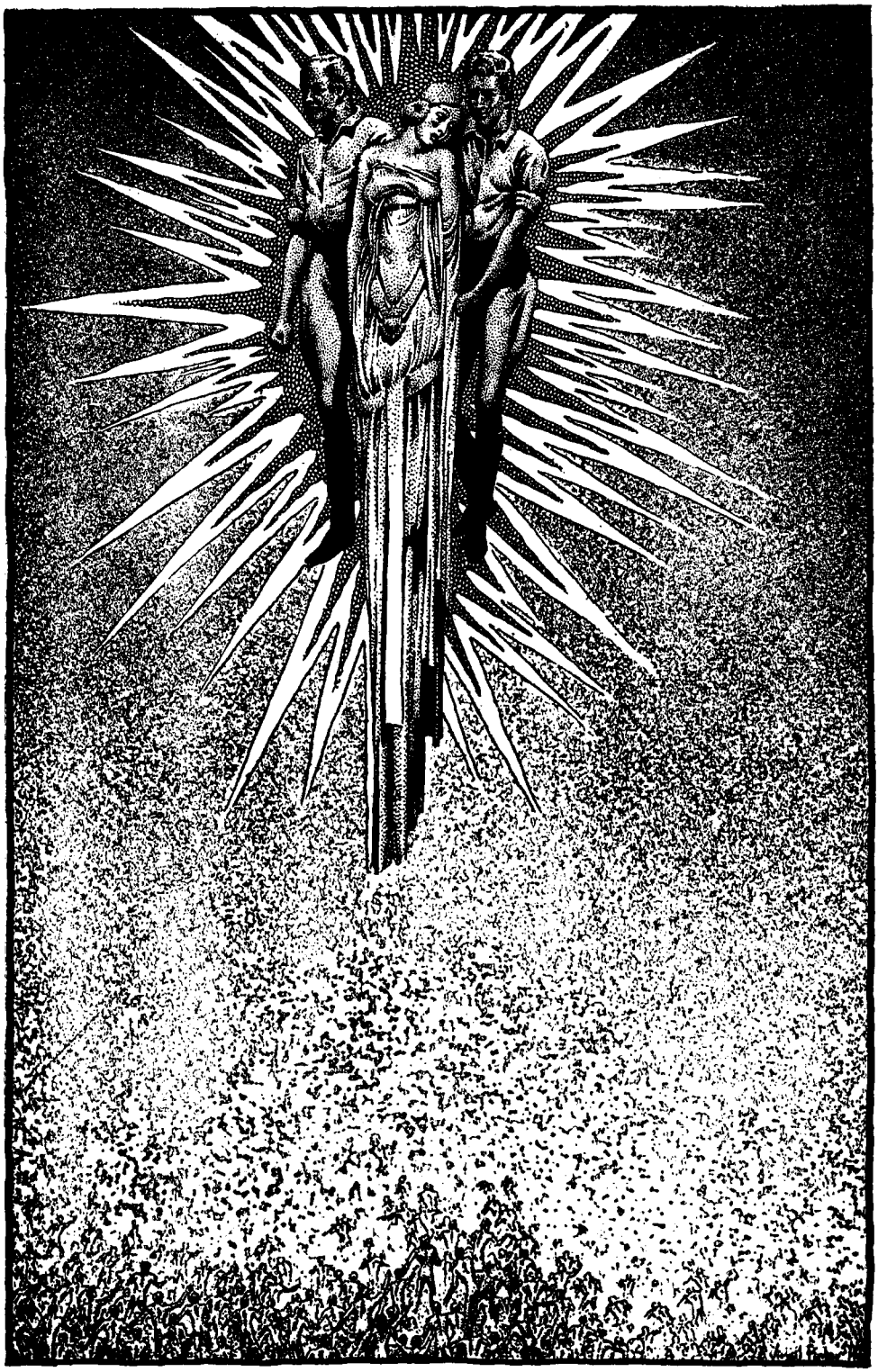

Soul-sick, we gazed. The hordes of the dead-alive stretched beneath us

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Its contents were aromatic, unfamiliar but astonishingly effective, for as soon as they passed my lips I felt a surge of strength; consciousness was restored.

"Larry!" I cried. "Is he dead?"

Lakla shook her head; her eyes were troubled.

"No," she said; "but he is like one dead —and yet unlike—"

"Put me down," I demanded to my bearer.

He tightened his hold; round eyes upon the Golden Girl. She spoke—in sonorous, reverberating monosyllables—and I was set upon my feet; I leaped to the side of the Irishman. He lay limp, with a disquieting, abnormal sequacity, as though every bone and muscle were utterly flaccid. The flesh was stone cold; the pulse barely perceptible, long intervaled; the respiration undiscoverable. There were no nervous reflexes or reactions; the pupils of the eyes were enormously dilated; it was as though life had been drawn from every nerve.

"What did this?" I asked.

Lakla shook her head, looking at Rador, the trouble in her eyes deepening.

"At first I thought it was the Keth that was cast, but—" The green dwarf hesitated.

"A light flashed from the road. It struck his face and seemed to sink in," I said.

"I saw," answered Rador; "but what it was I know not; and I thought I knew all the weapons of our rulers." He glanced at me curiously. "Some talk there has been that the stranger who came with you, Double Tongue, was making new death tools for Lugur," he ended.

Von Hetzdorp! The German at work already in this storehouse of devastating energies, fashioning the weapons for his plots! The Apocalyptic vision swept back upon me, and I resolved that this quick blossoming of dread possibilities I had foreseen should be destroyed before it fruited—aye, and Von Hetzdorp with it.

"HE IS not dead." Lakla's voice was poignant. "He is not dead; and the Three have wondrous healing. They can restore him if they will—and they will. they *will!*" For a moment she was silent. "Now their gods help Lugur and Yolara," she whispered; "for come what may, whether the Silent Ones be strong or weak, if he dies surely will I fall upon them with my Akka and I will slay those two with the Yekta death—with my own hands —yea, though I too, perish!"

"Yolara and Lugur shall both die," Olaf's eyes were burning. "But Lugur is mine to slay."

That pity I had seen before in Lakla's eyes when she looked upon the Norseman banished the white wrath from them. She turned, half hurriedly, as though to escape his gaze, fastened upon her with hope-poised yearning.

He sighed, dropped behind.

"The white maiden knows," he murmured. "Not yet does she will to speak, and until she speaks I will not despair—no!"

Lakla glanced behind.

"Walk with us," she said to me, "unless you are still weak."

I shook my head, gave a last look at O'Keefe; there was nothing I could do; I stepped beside her. She thrust a white arm into mine protectingly, the wonderfully chiseled hand with its long, tapering fingers catching about my wrist; my heart glowed toward her.

"Soon we walk no more," she said. "When the Portal called, we sped back, my Akka and I, leaving the bearers behind. They wait for us, not far ahead. Are you strong enough?" she asked anxiously. "Or shall I call Ork to carry you again?"

I shook my head vigorously.

"Your medicine is potent, handmaiden," I answered. "And the touch of your hand would give me strength enough, even had I not drunk it," I added in Larry's best manner.

Her eyes danced, trouble flying.

"Now, that was well spoken for such a man of wisdom as Rador tells me you are." She laughed, and a little pang shot through me. Could not a lover of science present a compliment without it always

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seeming to be as unusual as plucking a damask rose from a cabinet of fossils? Ah, well, as I have said, those who swear allegiance to Minerva must expect the suspicion of Aphrodite.

Mustering my philosophy, I smiled back at her. Again I noted that broad, classic brow, with the little tendrils of shining bronze caressing it, the tilted, delicate, nut-brown brows that gave a curious touch of innocent *diablerie* to the lovely face—flowerlike, pure, high-bred. A touch of roguishness, subtly alluring, sparkling over the maiden Madonna-ness that lay ever like a delicate, luminous suggestion beneath it. The long, black, curling lashes—the tender, rounded, bare left breast—

"What is wisdom, O maiden, but clear seeing and understanding?" I replied. "And never has my wisdom, such as it is, seen clearer than when I look upon your countenance."

A little flush sped over her face. Rador laughed.

"I have always liked you," she murmured naïvely, enchantingly embarrassed "since first I saw you in that place where the Shining One goes forth into your world. And I am glad you like—you like my medicine as well as that you carry in the black box that you left behind," she added.

"How know you of that, Lakla?" I gasped.

"Oft and oft I came to him there, and to you, while you lay sleeping. How call you *him?*" She paused.

"Larry!" I said.

"Larry!" She repeated it excellently. "And you?"

"Goodwin," said Rador.

I bowed quite as though I were being introduced to some charming young lady met in that old world life now seemingly eons removed.

"Yes, Goodwin," she said. "Oft and oft I came. Sometimes I thought you saw me. And he—did he not dream of me sometimes?" she asked wistfully.

"He did," I said, "and watched for you." The amazement grew vocal. "But how came you?" I asked.

"By a strange road," she answered, "to see that all was well with him, and to look into his heart; for I feared Yolara and her beauty. But I saw that she was not in his heart." A blush burned over her, turning even the little bare breast rosy. "It is a strange road," she went on hurriedly. "Many times have I followed it and watched the Shining One bear back its prey to the blue pool; seen the woman *he* seeks"—she made a quick gesture toward Olaf—"and a babe cast from her arms in the last pang of her mother love; seen another woman throw herself into the Shining One's embrace to save a man she loved; and I could not help!" Her voice grew deep, thrilled. "The friend, it comes to me, who drew you here, Goodwin!"

Unable to speak, I stared at her in stark astonishment.

"Well," she said, "you must pass upon that road, too, Goodwin; and he, if he live, to see what you must—the Silent Ones are speaking to me, and by that I know he shall live." Her face was rapt, with that expression that Delphi's pythoness must have borne, listening to the whispers of Apollo. "But not he—not the great one you call Olaf; he may not pass upon it," she murmured, and again the pity welled up in the eyes of gold.

She was silent, walking as one who sees visions and listens to voices unheard by others. Rador made a warning gesture; I crowded back my questions, glanced about me. We were passing over a smooth strand, hard packed as some beach of long- thrust-back ocean. It was like crushed garnets, each grain stained deep red, faintly sparkling. On each side were distances, the floor stretching away into them bare of vegetation—stretching on and on into infinitudes of rosy mist, even as did the space above.

Flanking and behind us marched the giant batracians, fivescore of them at least, black scale and crimson scale lustrous and gleaming in the rosaceous radiance; saucer eyes, shining circles of phosphorescence, green, purple, red; spurs clicking as they crouched along with a gait at once grotesque and formidable.

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AHEAD the mist deepened into a ruddier glow; through it a long, dark line began to appear—the mouth, I thought, of the caverned space through which we were going; it was just before us; over us—we stood bathed in a flood of rubescence!

A sea stretched before us—a crimson sea, gleaming like that lost lacquer of royal coral and the Flame Dragon's blood which Fu S'cze set upon the bower he built for the sun maiden he had stolen—that going toward it she might think it the sun itself rising over the summer seas. Unmoved by wave or ripple, it was placid as some deep woodland pool when night rushes up over the world.

About it was no hint of stagnancy, no unpleasant suggestion of tide of blood. Rather it seemed molten, or as though some hand great enough to rock earth had distilled here from conflagrations of autumn sunsets their flaming essences.

A fish broke through, large as a shark, blunt-headed, flashing bronze, ridged and mailed as though with serrate plates of armor. It leaped high, shaking from it a sparkling spray of rubies; dropped and shot up a geyser of fiery gems.

Across my line of vision, moving stately over the sea, floated a half globe, luminous, diaphanous, its iridescence melting into turquoise, thence to amethyst, to orange, to scarlet shot with rose, to vermilion, a translucent green, thence back into the iridescence. Behind it were four others, and the least of them ten feet in diameter, and the largest no less than thirty. They drifted past like bubbles blown from froth of rainbows by pipes in mouths of Titans' young. Then from the base of one arose a tangle of shimmering strands. Long, slender whiplashes that played about and sank slowly again beneath the crimson surface.

I gasped, for the fish had been a ganoid, that ancient, armored form that was perhaps the most intelligent of all life on our planet during the Devonian era. But these for age upon age had vanished, save for their fossils held in the embrace of the stone that once was their soft bottom bed. And the half-globes were *Medusae,* jellyfish, of a size, luminosity, and color unheard of.

Now Lakla cupped her mouth with pink palms and sent a clarion note ringing out. The ledge on which we stood continued a few hundred feet before us, falling abruptly, though from no great height to the Crimson Sea. At right and left it extended in a long semicircle. Turning to the right whence she had sent her call, I saw rising a mile or more away, veiled lightly by the haze, a rainbow, a gigantic prismatic arch, flattened, I thought, by some quality of the strange atmosphere. It sprang from the ruddy strand, leaped the crimson tide, and dropped three miles away upon a precipitous, jagged upthrust of rock frowning black from the lacquered depths.

And surmounting a higher ledge beyond this upthrust a huge dome of dull gold, Cyclopean, striking eyes and mind with something unhumanly alien, baffling. Sending the mind groping, as though across the deserts of space, from some far-flung star, should fall upon us linked sounds, coherent certainly, meaningful s u r e l y, vaguely familiar. Yet never to be translated into any symbol or thought of our own particular planet.

This sea of crimson lacquer, with its floating moons of luminous color—this bow of prismed light leaping to the weird isle crowned by the anamalous, aureate—excrescence—the half human batracians—the elf land through which we had passed with all its hidden wonders and terrors—I felt the foundations of my cherished knowledge shaking. Was this all a dream? Was this body of mine lying somewhere, fighting a fevered death, and all these but images floating through the breaking chambers of my brain? My knees shook; I groaned.

Lakla turned, looked at me anxiously, slipped a soft arm behind me, held me till the vertigo passed.

"Patience," she said. "The bearers come. Soon you shall rest."

I looked; down toward us from the bow's end were leaping swiftly another score of frog-men. Some bore litters, high, handled, not unlike palanquins—

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"Asgard!" Olaf stood beside me, eyes burning, pointing to the arch. "Bifrost Bridge, sharp as sword edge, over which souls go to Valhalla. And *she*—she is a *valkyr*—a sword maiden, ja!"

I gripped the Norseman's hand. It was hot, and a pang of remorse shot through me. If this place had so shaken me, how must it have shaken Olaf, who had neither my armor of science nor Larry's protecting belief that outside of Ireland could occur only wholly natural phenomena. As soon as we reached wherever we were going, Olaf must be cared for—surely only his obsessing grief and his fixed idea of vengeance could have carried him so far!

And it was with relief that I watched him, at Lakla's gentle command, drop humbly into one of the litters and lie back, eyes closed, as two of the monsters raised its yoke to their scaled shoulders. Nor was it without further relief that I myself lay back on the soft velvety cushions of another.

The cavalcade began to move. Lakla had ordered O'Keefe placed beside her, and she sat, knees crossed Orient fashion, leaning over the pale head on her lap, the white, tapering fingers straying fondly through his hair.

Presently I saw her reach up, slowly unwind a coronal of her tresses, shake them loose, and let them fall like a veil over her and him.

Her head bent low; I heard a soft sobbing—I turned away my gaze, lorn enough in my own heart, God knew!

CHAPTER XXIX

THE THREE SILENT ONES

THE arch was closer, and in my awe as I looked upon it I forgot for the moment Larry and aught else. For this was no rainbow, no thing born of light and mist, no Bifrost Bridge of myth—no! It was a flying arch of stone, stained with flares of Tyrian purples, of royal scarlets, of blues dark as the Gulf Stream's ribbon, sapphires soft as midday May skies, splashes of chromes and greens. A palette of giantry, a bridge of wizardry; a hundred, nay, a thousand, times greater than that of Utah which the Navaho call Nonnegozche and worship, as well they may, as a god, and which is itself a rainbow in eternal rock.

It sprang from the ledge and winged its prodigious length in one low arc over the sea's crimson breast. As though in some ancient paroxysm of earth it had been hurled molten, crystallizing into that stupendous span and still flaming with the fires that had molded it.

Closer we came and closer, while I watched spellbound; now we were at its head, and the litter-bearers swept upon it. All of five hundred feet wide it was, surface smooth as a city road, sides low walled, curving inward as though in the jetting-out of its making the edges of the plastic rock had curled.

On and on we sped; the high thrusting precipices upon which the bridge's far end rested, frowned close; the enigmatic, dully shining dome loomed ever greater. Now we had reached that end; were passing over a smooth plaza whose level door was enclosed, save for a rift in front of us, by the fanged tops of the black cliffs.

From this rift stretched another span, half a mile long, perhaps, widening at its center into a broad platform. It continued straight to two massive gates set within the face of the second cliff wall like panels, and of the same dull gold as the dome rising high beyond. And this smaller arch passed over a pit, an abyss, of which the outer precipices were the rim holding back from the pit the red flood.

We were rapidly approaching; now upon the platform, my bearers were striding closely along the side. I leaned out—a giddiness seized me! I gazed down into depth upon vertiginous depth; an abyss indeed. An abyss dropping to world's base like that in which the Babylonians believed writhed Talaat, the serpent mother of Chaos; a pit that struck down into earth's heart itself. It was as though I were looking over the edge of a world into illimitable space.

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Now, what was that, distance upon unfathomable distance below? A stupendous glowing like the green fire of life itself. What was it like? I had it! It was like the corona of the sun in eclipse—that other burgeoning of unknown elements that makes of our luminary when moon veils it an incredible blossoming of splendors in the black heavens.

And strangely, strangely, it was like the Dwellers' beauty when with its dazzling spiralings and whirlings it raced amid its storm of crystal bell sounds!

The abyss was behind us; we had paused at the golden portals; they swung inward. A wide corridor filled with soft light was before us; and on its threshold stood—bizarre, yellow gems gleaming, huge muzzle wide in what was evidently meant for a smile of welcome—the woman frog of the Moon Pool wall. And from behind her leaped a frog-child, black and scarlet as were our guards, who with little croakings and boomings of joy jumped into the arms of the giant who had led us—he who had gone before Lakla at Yolara's interrupted feast, and whose beastly club had so narrowly missed scattering the brains of O'Keefe.

Lakla raised her head; swept back the silken tent of her hair and gazed at me with eyes misty from weeping. The frog-woman crept to her side; gazed down upon Larry; spoke—spoke—to the Golden Girl in a swift stream of the sonorous, reverberant monosyllables; and Lakla answered her in kind. The webbed digits swept over O'Keefe's face, felt at his heart; she shook her head and moved with extraordinary rapidity ahead of us up the passage. The golden gates closed.

STILL borne in the litters we went on, winding, ascending until at last they were set down in a great hall carpeted with soft fragrant rushes and into which from high narrow slits streamed the crimson light from without.

I jumped over to Larry; there had been no change in his condition; still the terrifying limpness, the slow, infrequent pulsation. Rador and Olaf—and the fever now seemed to be gone from him—came and stood beside me, silent.

"I go to the Three," said Lakla. "Wait you here." She passed through a curtaining; nor one word did we utter until she returned, standing there about the body of the man whom each of us, in his own fashion, loved well. Then as swiftly as she had gone she came through the hangings; tresses braided, a swathing of golden gauze about her.

"Rador," she said, "bear you Larry—for into your heart the Silent Ones would look. And fear nothing," she added at the green dwarf's disconcerted, almost fearful start.

Rador bowed, started to lift O'Keefe; was thrust aside by Olaf.

"No," said the Norseman; "I will carry him."

He lifted Larry like a child against his broad breast. The dwarf glanced quickly at Lakla; she nodded.

"Come!" she commanded, and held aside the folds.

Of that journey I have few memories. I only know that we went through corridor upon corridor; successions of vast halls and chambers, some carpeted with the rushes, others with rugs into which the feet sank as into deep, soft meadows. There were glimpses of things carved, things wrought and woven; brilliant screens of feathers; great tapestries and odd, unfamiliar, thronelike seats. Divans like giants' beds; spaces illumined by the rubrous light, and spaces in which softer lights held sway.

We paused before a slab of the same crimson stone as that the green dwarf had called the Portal, and upon its polished surface, even as they had upon it, weaved the unnameable symbols. The Golden Girl pressed upon its side; it slipped softly back; a torrent of opalescence gushed out of the opening—and as one in a dream I entered.

We were, I knew, just under the dome; but for the moment, caught in the flood of radiance, I could see nothing. It was like being held within a fire opal—so bril-

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liant, so flashing, was it. I closed my eyes, opened them; the lambency cascaded from the vast curves of the globular walls. In front of me was a long, wide opening in them, through which, far away, I could see the end of the wizards' bridge, and the ledged opening of the cavern through which we had come. Against the light from within beat the crimson light from without —and was checked as though by a barrier.

I felt Lakla's touch; turned.

A hundred paces away was a dais, its rim raised a yard above the floor. From the edge of this rim streamed upward a steady, coruscating mist of the opalescence, veined even as was that of the Dweller's shining core and shot with milky shadows like curdled moonlight; up it stretched like a wall.

Over it, from it, down upon me, gazed three faces—two clearly male, one a woman's. At the first I thought them statues, and then the eyes of them gave the lie to me; for the eyes were alive, terribly, and if I could admit the word—*supernaturally*—alive.

They were thrice the size of the human eye and triangular, the apex of the angle upward; black as jet, pupilless, filled with tiny, leaping red flames. And they were the eyes of that little cloud I had seen hovering about Lakla in what I had then thought to be surely a singularly vivid dream.

Over them were foreheads, not as ours —high and broad and vizored. Their sides drawn forward into a vertical ridge; a prominence, an upright wedge, somewhat like the vizored heads of some of the great lizards. And the heads, long, narrowing at the back, were fully twice the size of mankind's!

Upon the brows were caps, and with a fearful certainty I knew that they were *not* caps. Long, thick strands of gleaming, yellow, feathered scales, thin as sequins! Sharp, curving noses like the beaks of the giant condors; mouths thin, austere; long, powerful, pointed chins. The—*flesh*—of the faces white as whitest marble; and wreathing up to them, covering all their bodies, the shimmering, curdled, misty fires of opalescence!

Olaf stood rigid; my own heart leaped wildly. What—what were these beings?

I forced myself to look again—and from their gaze streamed a current of reassurance, of will—nay, of intense spiritual strength. I saw that they were not fierce, not ruthless, not inhuman, despite their strangeness. No, they were kindly, in some unmistakable way, benign and sorrowful. So sorrowful! I straightened, gazed back at them fearlessly. Olaf drew a deep breath, gazed steadily, too, the hardness, the despair wiped from his face.

NOW Lakla drew closer to the dais; the three pairs of eyes searched hers, the woman's with an ineffable tenderness; some message seemed to pass between the three and the Golden Girl. She bowed low, turned to the Norseman.

"Place Larry there," she said softly—"there, at the feet of the Silent Ones."

She pointed into the radiant mist; Olaf started, hesitated, stared from Lakla to the Three, searched for a moment their eyes—and something like a smile drifted through them. He stepped forward, lifted O'Keefe, set him squarely within the covering light. It wavered, rolled upward, swirled about the body, steadied again—and within it there was no sign of Larry!

Again the mist wavered, shook, and seemed to climb higher, hiding the chins, the beaked noses, the brows of that incredible Trinity. But before it ceased to climb, I thought I saw the yellow, feathered heads bend; sensed a movement as though they lifted something.

The mist fell; the eyes gleamed out again, inscrutable.

And groping out of the radiance, pausing at the verge of the dais. leaping down from it, came Larry, laughing, filled with life, blinking as one who draws from darkness into sunshine. He saw Lakla, sprang to her, gripped her in his arms.

"Lakla!" he cried. *"Mavourneen!"*

Swiftly she slipped from his embrace, blushing, glancing at the Three shyly, half-

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fearfully. And again I saw the tenderness creep into the inky, flame-shot orbs of the woman being; and a tenderness in the others, too—as though they regarded some well-beloved child.

"Doc," shouted Larry, catching me by the hand, "what hit me? Say, I've had some dream. Where are we?"

Lakla touched his arm and proceeded to answer his question.

"You lay in the arms of Death, Larry," she said. "And the Silent Ones drew you from him. Do homage to the Silent Ones, Larry, for they are good and they are mighty!"

She turned his head with one of the long, white hands—and he looked into the faces of the Three; looked long, was shaken even as had been Olaf and myself. And he stiffened under that same wave of power and of—of—what can I call it?—holiness that streamed from them.

Then for the first time I saw real awe mount into his face. Another moment he stared, and dropped upon one knee and bowed his head before them as would a worshiper before the shrine of his saint. And—I am not ashamed to tell it—I joined him; and with us knelt Lakla and Olaf and Rador.

We bent there, my heart as full of thanksgiving and of confidence as a child who has passed through nightmare land into safe fireside haven. I looked up; the eyes of the Trinity were soft, the leaping flames within them quiet, the black depths filled with tenderness.

Then the mist of fiery opal swirled up, covering them.

And with a long, deep, joyous sigh Lakla took Larry's hand, drew him to his feet, and silently we followed them out of that hall of wonder.

But why, in going, did the thought come to me that from where the Three sat throned they ever watched the cavern mouth that was the door into their abode; and looked down ever into the unfathomable depth in which glowed and pulsed that mystic flower, colossal, awesome, of green flame that had seemed to me fire of life itself?

CHAPTER XXX

SPECULATION

I HAD slept soundly and dreamlessly. I wakened quietly in the great chamber into which Rador had ushered O'Keefe and myself after that culminating experience of crowded, nerve-racking hours—the facing of the weird Three.

I remembered the drowsiness that had come upon me as tension relaxed beneath the reassurance, the calm that had flowed from them. How sleepily I had partaken of the food and drink served by marvelously deft fingers of frog-women. The unwonted gravity of Larry listening to Rador's tale of the little paralyzing lariat of light and of his suspicions regarding Von Hetzdorp's part in it. The O'Keefe's troubled silence as he contemplated, even as had I, the possibilities brought so close by this revelation of the German's energy. The shy quietness of Lakla, her heart so plainly filled with happiness that there was no corner left for even shadow of apprehension. The beginnings of Larry's eager questioning as to the Silent Ones; the half-wistful distress of the handmaiden's obvious evasions that had so quickly stilled him, and the almost embarrassed haste with which she bundled us off to bed in care of the green dwarf, who, after seeing us comfortably installed on two of the enormous cushion-covered divans, had taken Olaf as company for himself.

Much to my relief Larry had, by that time, revealed himself as weary too, tumbling well-nigh rudely off to sleep with only a muttered: "Sleep tight, Doc!"

Now, lying gazing upward at the high-vaulted ceiling, I heard his voice:

"They look like birds." Evidently he was thinking of the Three; a silence—then: "Yes, they look like birds—and they look, and it's meaning no disrespect to them at all, they look like lizards." Another silence. "And they look like some sort of gods, and, by the good sword-arm of Brian Boru, they look human, too! And it's none of them they are either, so what—what the sainted St. Bridget are they?" Another short

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silence, and then in a tone of awed and absolute conviction: "That's it, sure! That's what they are. It all hangs in. They couldn't be anything else—"

He gave a whoop: a pillow shot over and caught me across the head.

"Wake up!" shouted Larry. "Wake up, ye seething caldron of fossilized superstitions! Wake up, ye bogy-haunted man of scientific unwisdom!"

Under pillow and insults I bounced to my feet, filled for a moment with quite real wrath. He lay back, roaring with laughter, and my anger was swept away.

"If I hadn't known already, that it's a real two-fisted man you are, Doc, I'd know it now!" he gasped. "And I needed something heavy to wake you up. Here I've been lying and soliloquizing for the last half-hour, and you sleeping like a mermaid on the top of a wave. Although in all candor, Doc, if any mermaid slept like you, she'd have no difficulty in getting a job as a fog-buoy."

This last annoyed me greatly, because I have habituated myself to sleeping silently, my explorations having taken me into many regions where it would be the height of folly to seek slumber unless one were absolutely sure that slumber could give no signal to one's whereabouts. His solemn disclaimer of seriousness upon my anxious queries and my explanation of the reason for them relieved me therefore greatly.

"Doc," he said, very seriously, after this, "I know who the Three are!"

"Yes?" I queried with studied sarcasm.

"Yes," he mimicked. He paused under the menace of my look, grinned. "Yes, I know," he continued. "They're of the *Tuatha De,* the old ones, the great people of Ireland; that's who they are!"

I knew, of course, of the *Tuatha De Danann,* the tribes of the god Danu, the half-legendary, half-historical clan who found their home in Erin some four thousand years before the Christian era, and who have left so deep an impression upon the Celtic mind and its myths. Mighty necromancers they were supposed to be, skilled in all charms, lords of the forces of nature. They destroyed the fierce Firbolgs, all but annihilated the Formarians—the latter, legend has it, by their wizardry.

Exist they certainly did, although one is permitted to doubt their accredited powers. History is inclined to place them as migrants of Greece—although some also place them as an advanced race of the middle stone age—and to attribute their disappearance to the invasion of Ireland by the Milesians. But the legends of Ireland will not have it that they were conquered. They say that the *Tuatha De* withdrew into the fairy mounds, where they still dwell, and through which is the way to Tir n'Og, their paradise.

Whatever they were, no ancients ever stamped themselves so strongly upon the imagination of a race as these have upon the Gaels.

"Yes," said Larry again, "the *Tuatha De* —the Ancient Ones who had spells that could compel Mananan, who is the spirit of all the seas, and Keithor, who is the god of all green living things, and even Hesus, the unseen god, whose pulse is the pulse of all the firmament. Yes, an' Orchil too, who sits within the earth an' waves with the shuttle of mystery her three looms of birth an' life an' death—even Orchil would weave as they commanded!"

He was silent. Then:

"These are of them—the mighty ones. Why else would I have bent my knee to them as I would have to the spirit of my dead mother? Why else would Lakla, whose gold-brown hair is the hair of Eilidh the Fair, whose mouth is the sweet mouth of Deirdre, an' whose soul walked with mine ages agone among the fragrant green myrtle of Erin, serve them?" he whispered, eyes full of dream.

"Have you any idea how they got here?" I asked, not unreasonably.

"I haven't thought about that," he replied somewhat testily. "But at once, me excellent man o' wisdom, a number occur to me. One of them is that this little party of three might have stopped here on their way to Ireland, an' for good reasons of

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their own decided to stay a while. An' another is that they might have come here afterward, havin' got wind of what those rats out there were contemplatin', and have stayed on the job till the time was ripe to save Ireland from 'em; the rest of the world, too, of course," he added magnanimously, "but Ireland in particular. And do any of those reasons appeal to ye?"

I shook my head.

"Well, what do you think?" he asked wearily.

"I THINK," I said cautiously, "that we face an evolution of highly intelligent beings from ancestral sources radically removed from those through which mankind ascended. These half-human, highly developed batracians they call the Akka, prove that evolution in these caverned spaces has certainly pursued one difference path than on earth.

"What I think, since you have asked me, Larry O'Keefe," I went on, "is that the Three are of a race which came up from a lizard form.

"Finally, I think that the race to which the Three belong never appeared on earth's surface; that their development took place here unhindered through hundreds of thousands of years. During which, because of its chaotic condition, any higher intelligence could not have existed on the surface of our planet. If this is true, the structure of their brains, and therefore their reactions and potentialities must be different from ours. Hence their knowledge and command of energies unfamiliar to us—and hence, also, the grave question whether they may not have an entirely different sense of justice, of values—and that is rather terrifying!" I concluded.

"That last sort of knocks your argument, Doc," he said. "They had sense of justice enough to help me out. And certainly they know love. For I saw the way they looked at Lakla; and sorrow—for there was no mistaking that in their faces."

"I consider that a frivolous objection, Larry," I answered, a bit nonplused, nevertheless.

"There was that feeling of awe; I bent my knee to them," he said stubbornly. "I can't see any O'Keefe kneeling to anything whose great-grandfather was a lizard!"

"Great Scott, man!" I cried. "Do you believe in angels?"

"Yes—Lakla." He grinned.

"No," I said, "in heavenly angels?"

"Well—" He hesitated. "Yes, I do," half-defiantly.

"And where do you think angels come from?"

"Well, I don't know; I think there's one of them now who used to be my mother," he replied softly.

"Ah!" I pressed the point home. "And you'd kneel to her?"

"Would I!" he exclaimed.

"Well," I cried triumphantly, "is there any more shock to the reason in supposing that a lizard could develop slowly into one of these Three than there is in supposing a human being can, in a twinkling, turn into a winged and shining shape of glory!"

"You scientists are an inhuman lot, sometimes," he said. "That's why I like you to be superstitious now and then. It shows you're not fossilized!"

Just then the curtains parted, and in walked Rador.

"You have rested well," he smiled. "I can see. The handmaiden bade me call you. You are to eat with her in her garden."

O'Keefe was hustling into his clothes.

"Can you swim in that red stuff out there, uncle?" he asked.

"Don't you ever try it, Larree." Rador was plainly appalled. "There's a pool here—I'll show it to you. In the mean time—" He spun out through the hangings, returning a moment later with two man frogs carrying basins filled with clear water. Into these we dipped our hands and faces. Larry, splashing and rubbing vigorously, exclaimed:

"Lord! I wish I had a brush. Lakla must have one, though; look how she keeps her hair."

When he came out of the water and dressed, he pushed the laughing green dwarf ahead of him; the frog men blinked

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and followed. Down long corridors we trod and out upon a gardened terrace as beautiful as any of those of Yolara's city. Bowered, blossoming, fragrant, set high upon the cliffs beside the domed castle. A table, as of milky jade, was spread at one corner, but the Golden Girl was not there. A little path ran on and up, hemmed in by the mass of verdure. I looked at it longingly; Rador saw the glance; interpreted it and led me up the stepped, sharp slope into a rocky embrasure.

Here I was above the foliage, and everywhere the view was clear. Below me stretched the incredible bridge, with the frog people hurrying back and forth upon it. A pinnacle at my side hid the abyss. My eyes followed the cavern ledge. Above it the rock rose bare, but at the ends of the semicircular strand a luxuriant vegetation began, stretching from the crimson shores back into far distances. Of browns and reds and yellows, like an autumn forest, was the foliage, with here and there patches of dark-green, as of conifers. Five miles or more, on each side, the forests swept, and then were lost to sight in the haze.

I turned and faced an immensity of crimson waters, unbroken, a true sea, if ever there was one. A little breeze blew—the first real wind I had encountered in the hidden places; under it the surface, that had been as molten lacquer, rippled and dimpled. Little waves broke with a spray of rose-pearls and rubies. The giant *Medusae* drifted—stately, luminous, kaleidoscopic elfin moons.

Far down, peeping around a jutting tower of the cliff, I saw dipping, with the motion of the waves, a floating garden. The flowers, too, were luminous, indeed sparkling. Gleaming brilliants of scarlet and vermilions lighter than the flood on which they lay. Mauves and odd shades of reddish-blue. They glimmered and shone like a little lake of jewels.

A thought with me since our flight claimed utterance.

"Rador," I said, "if it is permissible to tell—how did Lakla, who is your sister's child, come to be handmaiden to the Three?"

"I can tell you that now, Goodwin," he answered. "I told you that of the Murians there are the black-haired, who are the *ladala,* and the soldiers from them; and the fair-haired, who are the rulers. From among the *ladala,* never from among the rulers, there is born once in two generations a girl baby whose eyes are golden; whose hair, even as a babe, is like that of Lakla's, and who is in other ways—different.

"Now, there are some who say that this child is of a strain that was among our people before we found this land and which strain was destroyed, for a certain reason, by the fair-haired. And there are others who say that the Silent Ones have something to do with it. Whatever the reason, by an ancient pact with the Three, this child, when it is but three months old, is carried here and given to the handmaiden who then serves. She it is who rears and instructs it, and when the child is fourteen *laya* old she takes the place of that handmaiden who has cared for it."

"And what becomes of the other one?" I asked.

"She—goes!" he answered. "She has the right, if she will, to choose a mate from the *ladala*. But none has done so. It is said that as reward—and perhaps because she is no more like the Murians than the Three—she is taken to that land of wonder beyond the black precipices of Dual. Or it may be that she goes where those who are the race of the Silent Ones dwell. I do not know."

"And where is that?" I asked. He shook his head.

"Lakla comes!" he said. "Let us go down."

IT WAS a shy Lakla who came slowly around the end of the path and, blushing furiously, held her hands out to Larry. And the Irishman took them, placed them over his heart, kissed them with a tenderness that had been lacking in the half-mocking, half-fierce caresses he had given

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the priestess. She blushed deeper, holding out the tapering fingers—then pressed them to her own heart.

"I like the touch of your lips, Larry," she whispered. "They warm me here." She pressed her heart again. "And they send little sparkles of light through me." Her brows tilted perplexedly, accenting the nuance of *diablerie,* delicate and fascinating, that they cast upon the flower face.

"Do you?" whispered the O'Keefe fervently. "Do you, Lakla?" He bent toward her. She caught the amused glance of Rador, drew herself aside half-haughtily.

"Rador," she said, "is it not time that you and the strong one, Olaf, were setting forth?"

"Truly it is, handmaiden," he answered respectfully enough, yet with a current of laughter under his words. "But as you know the strong one, Olaf, wished to see his friends here before we were gone. And he comes even now," he added, glancing down the pathway along which came striding the Norseman.

As he faced us I saw that a transformation had been wrought in him. Gone was the pitiful seeking, and gone, too, the hope. About him was implacable resolution, stony determination of one who knows the worst and has consecrated body and soul to meet and destroy it. The set lines softened as he looked at the Golden Girl and bowed low to her. He thrust a hand to O'Keefe and to me.

"There is to be battle," he said. "I go with Rador to call the armies of these frog people. As for me—Lakla has spoken. There is no hope for—for mine Helma in life, but there is hope that we destroy the Shining Devil and give mine Helma peace. And with that I am well content, *ja!* Well content!" He gripped our hands again. "We will fight!" he muttered. *"Ja!* And I will have vengeance!" The sternness returned; and with a salute Rador and he were gone.

Two great tears rolled from the golden eyes of Lakla.

"Not even the Shining Ones can heal those the Shining One has taken," she said. "He asked me, and it was better that I tell him. It is part of the Three's—*punishment*—but of that you will soon learn," she went on hurriedly. "Ask me no questions now of the Silent Ones. I thought it better for Olaf to go with Rador, to busy himself, to give his mind other than sorrow upon which to feed."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE WOOING OF LAKLA

UP THE path came five of the frog women, bearing platters and ewers. Their bracelets and anklets of jewels were tinkling; their middles covered with short kirtles of woven cloth studded with the sparkling ornaments.

And here let me say that if I have given the impression that the Akka are simply magnified frogs, I regret it. Froglike they are, and hence my phrase for them. But they are as unlike the frog, as we know it, as man is unlike the chimpanzee. Springing, I hazard, from the stegocephalia, the ancestor of the frogs, these batracians followed a different line of evolution and acquired the upright position just as man did his from the four-footed folk.

The great staring eyes, the shape of the muzzle were froglike, but the highly developed brain had set upon the head and shape of it vital differences. The forehead, for instance, was not low, flat, and retreating—its frontal arch was well defined. The head was, in a sense, well shaped, and with the females the great horny carapace that stood over it like a fantastic helmet was much modified, as were the spurs that were so formidable in the male; coloration was different also. The torso was upright; the legs a little bent, giving them their crouching gait—but I wander from my subject.

They set their burdens down. Larry looked at them with interest.

"You surely have those things well trained, Lakla," he said.

"Things!" The handmaiden arose, eyes flashing. "You call my Akka things!"

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"Well," said Larry, a bit taken aback, "what do you call them?"

"My Akka are a people," she retorted. "As much a people as your race or mine. They are good and loyal, and they have speech and arts, and they slay not, save for food or to protect themselves. And I think them beautiful, Larry, beautiful!" She stamped her foot. "And you call them things!"

Beautiful! These? Yet, after all, they were, in their grotesque fashion. And to Lakla, surrounded by them, from babyhood, they were not strange at all. Why shouldn't she think them beautiful? The same thought must have struck O'Keefe, for he flushed guiltily.

"I think them beautiful, too, Lakla," he said remorsefully. "It's my not knowing your tongue too well that traps me. Truly, I think them beautiful. I'd tell them so, if I knew their talk."

Lakla dimpled, laughed, spoke to the attendants in that strange speech that was unquestionably a language. They bridled, looked at O'Keefe with fantastic coquetry, clacked and boomed softly among themselves.

"They say they like you better than the men of Muria," laughed Lakla.

"Did I ever think I'd be swapping compliments with lady frogs!" he murmured to me. "Buck up, Larry. Keep your eyes on the captive Irish princess!" he muttered to himself.

"Rador goes to meet one of the *ladala* who is slipping through with news," said the Golden Girl as we addressed ourselves to the food. "Then, with Nak, he and Olaf go to muster the Akka, for there will be battle, and we must prepare. Nak," she added, "is he who went before me when you were dancing with Yolara, Larry." She stole a swift, mischievous glance at him. "He is headman of all the Akka."

"How comes the messenger through?" I asked. "Can he open the Portal?"

"No, but there are other ways," she answered, "although perilous, like that you took."

"I should think with what's brewing outside they would be guarded," said Larry.

"No," replied Lakla, almost indifferently. "Not many would dare take them; not many could pass over them unscathed. And there are always the guards at the gateway of the bridge there that none may pass. To come in force to be feared, they must go through the Portal, and it will give us warning. Besides, it will take all of four *tals* for them to plan and prepare, and during that time we will also have prepared."

"Just what forces can we muster against them when they come, darlin'?" said Larry.

"Darlin'?" The Golden Girl had caught the caress of the word. "What's that?"

"It's a little word that means Lakla," he answered. "It does, that is, when I say it. When you say it, it means Larry."

"I like that word," mused Lakla.

"You can even say Larry darlin'!" suggested O'Keefe.

"Larry darlin'!" said Lakla. "When they come we shall have first of all my Akka—"

"Can they fight, *mavourneen?*" interrupted Larry.

"Can they fight! My Akka!" Again her eyes flashed. "They will fight to the last of them, with the spears that give the swift rotting, covered, as they are, with the jelly of those *Saddu* there." She pointed through a rift in the foliage, across which on the surface of the sea, was floating one of the moon globes. And now I knew why Rador had warned Larry against a plunge there. "With spears and clubs and with teeth and nails and spurs. They are a strong and brave people, Larry darlin', and though they hurl the Keth at them, it is slow to work upon them, and they slay even while they are passing into the nothingness!"

"And have we none of the Keth?" he asked.

"No." She shook her head. "None of their weapons have we here, although it was—it was the Ancient Ones who shaped them."

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"But the Three are of the Ancient Ones?" I cried. "Surely they can tell."

"No," she said slowly. "No, there is something to be told you—and soon; and then the Silent Ones say you will understand. You, especially, Goodwin, who worship wisdom."

The raptness vanished, her eyes cleared.

"Then," said Larry, "we have the Akka; and we have the four men of us, and among us three guns and about a hundred cartridges—an'—an' the power of the Three— But what about the Shinning One, Fireworks—"

"I do not know." Again the indecision that had been in her eyes when Yolara had launched her defiance crept back. "The Shining One is strong, and he has his slaves!"

"Well, we'd better get busy good and quick!" the O'Keefe's voice rang. But Lakla, for some reason of her own, would pursue the matter no further. The trouble fled from her eyes. They danced.

"Larry darlin'!" she murmured. "I like the touch of your lips—"

"You do?" he whispered, all thought flying of anything but the beautiful, provocative face so close to his. "Then, *acushla,* you're goin' to get acquainted with 'em! Turn your head, Doc!" he said.

And I turned it. There was quite a long silence, broken by an interested, soft outburst of gentle boomings from the serving frog maids. I stole a glance behind me. Lakla's head lay on the Irishman's shoulder, the golden eyes misty sun-pools of love and adoration. And the O'Keefe, a new look of power and strength upon his clear-cut features, was looking down into them with that look which rises only from the heart touched for the first time with that true, all-powerful love, which is the pulse of the universe itself. The real music of the spheres of which Plato dreamed, the love that is stronger than death itself, immortal as the high gods and the true soul of all that mystery we call life.

Then Lakla raised her hands, pressed down Larry's head, kissed him between the eyes. She drew herself with a trembling little laugh very slowly from his embrace.

"My mate!" she murmured, the golden voice throbbing.

"The future Mrs. Larry O'Keefe, Goodwin," said Larry to me a little unsteadily.

I took their hands—and Lakla kissed me!

She turned to the booming, smiling frog maids; gave them some command, for they filed away down the path. Suddenly I felt, well, a little superfluous.

"If you don't mind," I said, "I think I will go up the path there again and look about."

But they were looking at each other again, unheeding, and I stole away, up to the embrasure where Rador had taken me. The movement of the batracians over the bridge had ceased. Dimly, at the far end, I saw a cluster, ant sized, and supposed it to be the garrison that guarded it. I sent my mind past the entrance, back into the elf land of giant moss and blossomings, wondering wistfully whether I might ever study its wonders. My thoughts flew back to Lakla and to Larry. What was to be the end?

If we won, if we were able to pass from this place, could the Golden Girl live in our world? A product of these caverns with their atmosphere and light that seemed in some subtle way to be both food and drink—how would she react to the unfamiliar foods and the atmosphere and light of outer earth? I began to be oppressed. Surely they had been long enough by themselves. I descended the path.

STEPPING softly, not to embarrass them, I heard Larry.

"It's a green land, *mavourneen.* And the sea rocks and dimples around it—blue as the heavens, green as the isle itself, and foam horses toss their white manes, and the great, clean winds blow over it, and the sun shines down on it like your eyes, *acushla*—"

"And are you a king of Ireland, Larry darlin'?" Thus Lakla. I decided I might make my presence known.

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They sat, one of her white arms about Larry's neck, his hands caressing the silken webs of her hair.

"I was just tellin' the future Mrs. O'Keefe about her future home," he said half sheepishly. And looking into his eyes I stifled the apprehensions that I have noted.

Lakla arose, delicately, delightfully disconcerted.

"Soon," she said, "I must wait upon the Three. They have a message for you."

We turned to go, and around the corner of the path I caught another glimpse of what I have called the lake of jewels. I pointed to it.

"Those are lovely flowers, Lakla," I said. "I have never seen anything like them in the place from whence we come."

She followed my pointing finger, laughed.

"Come," she said, "let me show you them."

She ran down an intersecting way, we following; came out of it upon a little ledge close to the brink, three feet or more I suppose above it. The Golden Girl's voice ran out in a high-pitched, tremulous, throbbing call.

The lake of jewels stirred as though a breeze had passed over it; stirred, shook a shimmering torrent of shining flowers down upon us! She called again, the movement of the breeze became more rapid. The gem blooms streamed closer, closer, wavering, shifting, winding—at our very feet. Above them hovered a little radiant mist; a faint, oddly disturbing perfume wafted up, checking subtly the heart beat. The Golden Girl leaned over; called softly, and up from the sparkling mass shot a green vine whose heads were five flowers of flaming ruby. It shot up, flew into her hand and coiled about the white arm, its quintette of lambent blossoms—regarding us!

It was the thing Lakla had called the Yekta; that with which she had threatened the priestess; the thing that carried the dread of death. And the Golden Girl was handling it like a rose!

I gasped, Larry swore—I looked at it more closely. It was a hydroid, a development of that strange animal-vegetable that sometimes almost microscopic, waves in the sea depths like a cluster of flowers paralyzing its prey with the mysterious force that dwells in its blossom heads!

"Put it down, Lakla." The distress in O'Keefe's voice was deep. Lakla laughed mischievously, caught the real fear for her in his eyes; opened her hand, gave another faint call—and back it flew to its fellows.

"Why, it wouldn't hurt me, Larry!" she expostulated. "I feed them—the Yekta."

"I don't like it," he said hoarsely.

She sighed, gave another sweet, prolonged call. The lake of gems—rubies and amethysts, mauves and scarlet-tinged blues—wavered and shook even as it had before, and swept swiftly back to that place whence she had drawn them!

Then with Larry and Lakla walking ahead, white arm about his brown neck; the O'Keefe still expostulating, the handmaiden laughing merrily, we passed through her bower to the domed castle.

Glancing through a cleft I caught sight again of the far end of the bridge; noted among the clustered figures of the garrison a movement, a flashing of green fire like marsh-lights on spear tips; wondered idly what it was. And then, other thoughts crowding in, I followed along, head bent, behind the pair who had found in what was Olaf's hell, their true paradise.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE COMING OF YOLARA

"NEVER was there such a girl!" Thus Larry, dreamily, leaning head in hand on one of the wide divans of the chamber where Lakla had left us, pleading service to the Silent Ones.

"An', by the faith and the honor of the O'Keefes, an' by my dead mother's soul may God do with me as I do by her!" he whispered fervently.

I told him what Rador had revealed to me regarding the handmaiden and her

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origin. He nodded, showing no surprise whatever.

"Sure," he said. "It's as I told you. The Silent Ones are of the *Tuatha De,* an' they send to Ireland for the colleens. They won't have anything to do with the crowd here. Lakla's Irish—no doubt of it. Maybe she comes from one of the fairy hills, or maybe the handmaidens come straight from Tir n'Og. One of my own ancestors married a girl of the green people. an' the O'Keefes have long been kin to the *Sidh.* That's why I can see the leprechawns, and why the banshee is so faithful. Why not, when she's one of the family?"

He considered.

"They probably bring them in as changelings," he decided. "They do that in Ireland to this day. An' if she thinks her frogs are beautiful, why beautiful they are! An' if she wants to take 'em with her, why, by the *Lia Fail,* take 'em she shall. Even if every circus man in the United Kingdom complains to the king that we're ruinin' the business!"

He relapsed into open-eyed dreaming.

I walked about the room, examining it. It was the first opportunity I had gained to inspect carefully any of the rooms in the abode of the Three. It was octagonal, carpeted with the thick rugs that seemed almost as though woven of soft mineral wool, faintly shimmering, palest blue. I paced its diagonal; it was fifty yards; the ceiling was arched, and either of pale rose metal or metallic covering. The ceiling collected the light from the high, slitted windows, and shed it, diffused, through the room.

Around the octagon ran a low gallery not two feet from the floor, balustraded with slender pillars, close set; broken at opposite curtained entrances over which hung thick, dull-gold curtainings giving the same suggestion of metallic or mineral substance as the rugs. Set within each of the eight sides, above the balcony, were colossal slabs of lapis lazuli, inset with graceful but unplaceable designs in scarlet and sapphire blue.

There was the great divan on which mused Larry; two smaller ones; half a dozen low seats and chairs carved apparently of ivory and of dull soft gold. Touching these I found that they gave an impression of warmth, indeed of living warmth, as though they were infused with a slow, mild electric current. Or rather as though one touched a warm hand, so full of vitality was the sensation communicated.

Most curious were tripods, strong, pike-like legs of gold metal four feet high, holding small circles of the lapis intagliated with one curious symbol somewhat resembling the ideographs of the Chinese.

There was no dust. Nowhere in these caverned spaces had I found this constant companion of ours in the world overhead. My eyes caught a sparkle from a corner. Pursuing it, I found upon one of the low seats a flat, clear crystal oval, remarkably like a lens. I took it and stepped up on the balcony. Standing on tiptoe I found I commanded from the bottom of a window slit a view of the bridge approach. Scanning it I could see no trace of the garrison here, nor of the green spear flashes. I placed the crystal to my eyes, and with a disconcerting abruptness the cavern mouth leaped before me, apparently not a hundred feet away. Decidedly the crystal was a very excellent lens. But where were the guards?

I peered closely. Nothing! But now against the aperture I saw a score or more of tiny, dancing sparks. An optical illusion, I thought, and turned the crystal in another direction. There were no sparklings there. I turned it back again, and there they were. And what were they like? Realization came to me—they were like the little dancing, radiant atoms that had played for a time about the emptiness where had stood Songar of the Lower Waters before he had been shaken into the nothingness! And that green light I had noticed—the Keth!

A cry on my lips, I turned to Larry, and the cry died as the heavy curtainings at the entrance on my right undulated. They parted then as though a body had

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slipped through. Shook and parted again and again, with the dreadful passing of unseen things!

"Larry!" I cried. "Here! Quick!"

He leaped to his feet, gazed about wildly, and disappeared! Yes—vanished from my sight like the snuffed flame of a candle or as though something moving with the speed of light itself had snatched him away!

Then from the divan came the sounds of struggle, the hissing of straining breaths, the noise of Larry cursing. The pillows flew about as though the raging ghosts of a pair of panthers were tossing them. I leaped over the balustrade, drawing my own pistol. I was caught in a pair of mighty arms, my elbows crushed to my sides, drawn down until my face pressed close against a broad, hairy breast. And through that obstacle—formless, shadowless, transparent as air itself—I could still see the battle on the divan!

Now there were two sharp reports; the struggle abruptly ceased. From a point not a foot over the great couch, as though oozing from the air itself, blood began to drop, faster and ever faster, pouring out of nothingness.

And out of that same air, now a dozen feet away, leaped the face of Larry—bodyless, poised six feet above the floor, blazing with rage—floating weirdly, uncannily, to a hideous degree, in vacancy.

His hands flashed out. Armless, they wavered, appearing, disappearing—swiftly tearing something from him. Then there, feet hidden, stiff on legs that vanished at the ankles, striking out into vision with all the dizzy abruptness with which he had been stricken from sight, was the O'Keefe, a smoking pistol in hand.

And ever that red stream trickled out of vacancy and spread over the couch, dripping to the floor.

I MADE a mighty movement to escape; was held more firmly. And then close to the face of Larry, flashing out with that terrifying instantaneousness even as had his, was the head of Yolara, as devilishly mocking as I had ever seen it. The cruelty shone through it like delicate white flames from hell—and beautiful!

"Stir not! Strike not, until I command!" She flung the words behind her, addressed to the invisible ones who had accompanied her, whose presences I sensed filling the chamber. The floating, beautiful head, crowned high with corn-silk hair, darted toward the Irishman. He took a swift step backward. The gray eyes of the priestess deepened toward purple, sparkled with malice.

"So," she said. "So, Larree — you thought you could go from me so easily!" She laughed softly. "In my hidden hand I hold the Keth cone," she murmured. "Before you can raise the death tube I can smite you—and will. And consider, Larree, if the handmaiden, the *choya* comes, I can vanish, so"—the mocking head disappeared, burst forth again—"and slay her with the Keth. Or bid my people seize her and bear her to the Shining One! And anger me not too much, Larree, else may I grow wroth and let the Keth loose upon you, come what may," she ended darkly.

I saw tiny beads of sweat stand out on O'Keefe's forehead, and knew he was thinking not of himself, but of Lakla.

"What do you want with me, Yolara?" he asked hoarsely.

"Nay," came the mocking voice. "Not Yolara to you, Larree. Call me by those sweet names you taught me. Honey of the Wild Bee-e-s, Net of Hearts—" Again her laughter tinkled.

"What do you want with me?" His voice was strained, the lips rigid.

"Ah, you are afraid, Larree." There was diabolic jubilation in the words. "What should I want but that you return with me? Why else did I creep through the lair of the dragon worm and pass the path of perils but to ask you that? And the *choya* guards you not well." Again she laughed. "We came to the cavern's end and there were her Akka. And the Akka can see us, as shadows. But it was my desire to surprise you with my coming, Larree." The voice was silken. "And I feared that they

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would hasten to be first to bring you that message to delight in your joy. And so, Larree, I loosed the Keth upon them—and gave them peace and rest within the nothingness. And the portal below was open, almost in welcome!"

Once more the malignant, silver pealing of her laughter.

"What do you want with me?" There was loathing in his eyes, but plainly he strove for control.

'Want!" the silver voice hissed, grew calm. "Do not Siya and Siyana grieve that the rite I pledged them is but half done? And do they not desire it finished? And am I not beautiful? More beautiful than your *choya?*"

The fiendishness died from the eyes; they grew blue, wondrous. The veil of invisibility slipped down from the neck, the shoulders, half revealing the gleaming breasts. And weird, weird beyond all telling was that exquisite head and bust floating there in air. And beautiful, sinisterly beautiful beyond all telling, too. So even might Lilith, the serpent woman, have shown herself tempting Adam!

"And perhaps," she said; "perhaps I want you because I hate you. Perhaps because I love you. Or perhaps for Lugur or perhaps for the Shining One."

"And if I go with you?" He said it quietly.

"Then shall I spare the handmaiden, and—who knows?—take back my armies that even now gather at the portal and let the Silent Ones rot in peace in their abode, from which they had no power to keep me," she added venomously.

"You will swear that, Yolara; swear to go without harming the handmaiden?" he asked eagerly. The little devils danced in her eyes. I wrenched my face from the smothering contact.

"Don't trust her, Larry!" I cried. And again the grip choked me.

"Is that devil in front of you or behind you, old man?" he asked quietly, eyes never leaving the priestess. "If he's in front I'll take a chance and wing him, and then you scoot and warn Lakla."

But I could not answer; nor, remembering Yolara's threat, would I had I been able.

"Decide quickly!" There was cold threat in her voice. And then—

The curtains toward which O'Keefe had slowly, step by step, drawn close, opened. They framed the handmaiden! The face of Yolara changed into that gorgon mask that had transformed it once before at sight of the Golden Girl. In her blind rage she forgot to cast the occulting veil. Her hand darted like a snake out of the folds; poising itself with the little silver cone aimed at Lakla.

But before it was wholly poised, before the priestess could loose its force, the handmaiden was upon her. Swift as the lithe white wolf hound she leaped, and one slender hand gripped Yolara's throat, the other the wrist that lifted the quivering death; white limbs wrapped about the hidden ones. I saw the golden head bend, the hand that held the Keth swept up with a vicious jerk; saw Lakla's teeth sink into the wrist—the blood spurt forth and heard the priestess shriek. The cone fell, bounded toward me; with all my strength I wrenched free the hand that held my pistol, thrust it against the pressing breast and fired.

The clasp upon me relaxed; a red rain stained me; at my feet a little pillar of blood jetted. A hand thrust itself from nothingness, clawed, and was still.

Now Yolara was down, Lakla meshed in her writhings and fighting like some wild mother whose babes are serpent menaced. Over the two of them, astride, stood the O'Keefe, a pike from one of the high tripods in his hand—thrusting, parrying, beating on every side as with a broadsword against poniard-clutching hands that thrust themselves out of vacancy striving to strike him; stepping here and there, always covering, protecting Lakla with his own body even as a caveman of old who does battle with his mate for their lives.

The sword-club struck, and on the floor lay the half body of a dwarf, writhing

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with vanishments and reappearings of legs and arms. Beside him lay the shattered tripod from which Larry had wrenched his weapon. I flung myself upon it, dashed it down to break loose one of the remaining supports, struck in midfall one of the unseen even as his dagger darted toward me! The seat splintered, leaving in my clutch a golden bar. I jumped to Larry's side, guarding his back, whirling it like a staff; felt it crunch once—twice—through unseen bone and muscle.

AT THE door was a booming. Into the chamber rushed a dozen of the frog men. While some guarded the entrances, others leaped straight to us, and forming a circle about us, began to strike with talons and spurs at unseen things that screamed and sought to escape. Now here and there about the blue rugs great stains of blood appeared; heads of dwarfs, torn arms and gashed bodies, half occulted, half revealed.

And at last the priestess lay silent, vanquished, white body gleaming with that uncanny—fragmentariness—from her torn robes. The O'Keefe reached down, drew Lakla from her. Shakily, Yolara rose to her feet, panting, the hatred in her eyes, the hellish mask of her face no whit softened. The handmaiden, face still blazing with wrath, stepped before her; with difficulty she steadied her voice.

"Yolara," she said, "you have defied the Silent Ones, you have desecrated their abode, you came to slay these men who are the guests of the Silent Ones and me, who am their handmaiden. Why did you do these things?"

"I came for him!" gasped the priestess; she pointed to O'Keefe.

"Why?" asked Lakla.

"Because he is pledged to me," replied Yolara, all the devils that were hers in her face. "Because he wooed me! Because he is mine!"

"That is a lie!" The handmaiden's voice shook with rage. "It is a lie! But here and now he shall choose, Yolara. And if you he chooses, you and he shall go forth from here unmolested. For, Yolara, it is his happiness that I most desire, and if you are that happiness—you shall go together. And now, Larry, choose!"

Swiftly she stepped beside the priestess; swiftly wrenched the last shreds of the hiding robes from her.

There they stood—Yolara with but the filmiest net of gauze about her wonderful body; gleaming flesh shining through it. Serpent woman, and wonderful, too. Beyond the dreams even of Phidias—and hell fire glowing from the purple eyes.

And Lakla, like a girl of the Vikings, like one of those warrior maids who stood and fought for dun and babes at the side of those old heroes of Larry's own green isle; translucent ivory lambent through the rents of her torn traperies, and in the wide, golden eyes flaming wrath, indeed—not the diabolic flames of the priestess but the righteous wrath of some soul that looking out of paradise sees vile wrong in the doing.

The O'Keefe's voice was subdued, hurt. "There is no choice. I love you, Lakla, and only you, and have from the monent I saw you. It's not easy, this. God, Goodwin, I feel like an utter cad," he flashed at me. "There is no choice, Lakla," he ended, eyes steady upon hers.

The priestess's face grew deadlier still.

"What will you do with me?" she asked.

"Keep you," I said, "as hostage."

O'Keefe was silent; the Golden Girl shook her head.

"Well would I like to." Her face grew dreaming. "But the Silent Ones say no. They bid me let you go, Yolara."

"The Silent Ones," the priestess laughed. "You, Lakla, I surmise. You fear, perhaps, to let me tarry here too close!"

Storm gathered again in the handmaiden's eyes; she forced it back.

"No," she answered, "the Silent Ones so command, and for their own purposes. Yet do I think, Yolara, that you will have little time to feed your wickedness—tell that to Lugur—and to your Shining One!" she added slowly.

Mockery and disbelief rode high in the

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priestess's pose. "Am I to return alone, like this?" she asked.

"Nay, Yolara, nay; you shall be accompanied," said Lakla. "And by those who will guard, and watch, you well. They are here even now."

The hangings parted, and into the chamber came Olaf and Rador—and paused in blank amazement.

"You traitor!" hissed the priestess to the green dwarf. "Be sure that you shall not dance with the Shining One!"

He gazed at her, face stern, immovable; listened to Lakla's swift explanation.

"She shall be guarded—well!" was all he said. The priestess bit her lips, turned and met the fierce hatred and contempt in the eyes of the Norseman—and for the first time lost her bravado.

"Let not *him* go with me," she gasped. Her eyes searched the floor frantically.

"He goes with you," said Lakla, and threw about Yolara a swathing that covered the exquisite, alluring body. "And you shall pass through the Portal, not sulk along the path of the worm!"

She bent to Rador, whispered to him He nodded; she had told him, I supposed, the secret of its opening.

"Come," he said, and with the ice-eyed giant behind her, Yolara, head bent, passed out of those hangings through which, but a little before, unseen, triumph in her grasp, she had slipped.

THEN Lakla came to the unhappy O'Keefe, rested her hands on his shoulders, looked deep into his eyes.

"*Did* you woo her, even as she said?" she asked.

The Irishman flushed miserably.

"I did not," he said. "I was pleasant to her, of course, because I thought it would bring me quicker to you, darlin'."

She looked at him doubtfully; then—

"I think you must have been very—pleasant!" was all she said. And leaning toward him, she kissed him forgivingly straight on the lips.

An extremely direct maiden was Lakla, with a truly sovereign contempt for anything she might consider non-essential. At this moment I decided she was wiser even than I had thought her.

The O'Keefe's face was sheepish; then admiration blazed up in it. He caught her hands.

"Lord, but it was a brave thing to do," he cried. "You léaped like the white hound of Maev the Huntress, and you fought like Scathach of the Misty Isle who taught Cuchullin battle!"

"You were in danger, Larry," she answered, "and better that I die than live without you, darlin'."

"You bet you're Irish!" muttered the O'Keefe, hugging her to him rapturously. "An' with you beside me, an' the family banshee scoutin' ahead, I could be a king in Erin—if I wanted to take it from George, God bless him, which I don't."

"What is that you say in your strange tongue?" asked the Golden Girl.

"I said there was no other girl like you in the whole world, nor ever was!" said Larry.

He stepped toward me, stumbled, feet vanishing; reached down and picked up something that in the grasping turned his hand to air.

"One of the cloaks of invisibility," he said to me. "There must be quite a lot of 'em about. A little bit shopworn, 'tis true, but still damned useful."

There was a ghastly rattling at my feet; half the head of one of Yolara's men raised itself from nothingness; beat twice upon the floor in a last death throe; fell back. Lakla shivered, grew white; gave a command to the frog men still on guard. They moved about; lifting the unseen folds; revealing now in full stark rigidity dwarf after dwarf.

Lakla had been right. Her Akka were thorough fighters.

She called, and to her came the frog woman who was her attendant. To her the handmaiden spoke, pointing to the batracians who stood, paws and forearms melted beneath the robes they had gathered. She took them and passed out—more grotesque than ever, shattering into streaks of vacan-

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cies, reappearing with flickers of shining scale and yellow gems as the torn pennants of invisibility fluttered about her.

The frog-men reached down, swung each a dead dwarf in her arms, and filed, booming, away.

And feeling in my pocket, I drew out a little silver cone, caught and slipped there by me unconsciously as it rolled from Yolara's hand- -and knew then for what her mad eyes had been searching.

Decidedly the priestess's visit had added to our weapons, no matter how unpleasant her call had been.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN THE LAND OF THE DWELLER

WE HAD watched, Larry and I, the frog-men throw the bodies of Yolara's assassins into the crimson waters. As vultures swooped down upon the dying, there came sailing swiftly to where the dead men floated dozens of the luminous globes. Their slender, varicolored tentacles whipped out; the giant iridescent bubbles climbed over the cadavers. And as they touched them there was the swift dissolution, the melting away into putrescence of flesh and bone that I had witnessed when the dart touched fruit that time I had saved Rador. And upon this the *Medusae* gorged; pulsing lambently; their wondrous colors shifting, changing, glowing stronger. Elfin moons now indeed, but satellites whose glimmering beauty was fed by death; alembics of enchantment whose glorious hues were sucked from horror.

Sick, I turned away. O'Keefe was as pale as I. We passed back into the corridor that had opened on the ledge from which we had watched; met Lakla hurrying toward us. Before she could speak there throbbed faintly about us a vast sighing. It grew into a murmur, a whispering, shook us. Then passing like a presence, it died away in far distance.

"The Portal has opened," said the handmaiden. And a fainter sighing, like an echo of the other, mourned about us. "Yolara is gone," she said, "the Portal is closed. Now must we hasten. For the Three have ordered that you, Goodwin, and Larry and I go upon that strange road of which I have spoken, and which Olaf may not take lest his heart break. And we must return ere he and Rador cross the bridge."

Her hand sought Larry's; we passed down to a chamber in which stood a table, bearing one of the crystal ewers and goblets. From the former she poured a ruddy liquid; held a glass to me. Mischievously she kissed the lip of that she reached to Larry, and turning it he drank from the spot her mouth had touched. A weariness that I had not known was in me vanished away as I drank. I felt fortified, alert, eager—and in the O'Keefe's brightening eyes I read that he, too, had drawn to himself new force.

"Drink deep," said the handmaiden, and poured the goblet full again. "The road is strange, indeed, even to me who have followed it often. You will need all your strength to hold you steady upon it!"

But now, quaffing that second glass, I felt that there was no road that I could not travel.

"Come!" said Lakla, and we walked on: down and down through hall after hall, flight upon flight of stairways. Deep, deep indeed we must be beneath the domed castle. Lakla paused before a curved, smooth breast of the crimson stone rounding gently into the passage. She pressed its side; it revolved; we entered; it closed behind us.

The room, the—hollow—in which we stood was faceted like a diamond; and like a cut brilliant, its sides glistened—though dully. Its shape was a deep oval, and our path dropped down to a circular, polished base, roughly two yards in diameter. Glancing behind me I saw that in the closing of the entrance there had been left no trace of it save the steps that led to where that entrance had been. And as I looked these steps *turned,* leaving us isolated upon the circle, only the faceted walls about us. And in each of the gleaming faces the three of us reflected—dimly. It was as

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though we were within a diamond egg whose graven angles had been turned *inward*.

But the oval was not perfect; at my right a screen cut it—a screen that gleamed with fugitive, fleeting luminescences—stretching from the side of our standing place up to the tip of the chamber; slightly convex and criss-crossed by millions of fine lines like those upon a spectroscopic plate. But with this difference—that within each line I felt the presence of multitudes of finer lines, dwindling into infinitude, ultra-microscopic, traced by some instrument compared to whose delicacy our finest tool would be as a crowbar to the needle of the micrometer.

A foot or two from it stood something like the standee of a compass, bearing, like it, a cradled dial under whose crystal ran concentric rings of prisoned, lambent vapors, faintly blue. From the edge of the dial jutted a little shelf of crystal, a keyboard, in which were cut eight small cups.

Within these cups the handmaiden placed her tapering fingers. She gazed down upon the disk; pressed a digit, and the screen behind us slipped noiselessly into another angle.

"Put your arm around my waist, Larry, darlin', and stand close," she murmured. "You, Goodwin, place your arm over my shoulder."

Wondering, I did as she bade; she pressed other fingers upon the shelf's indentations. Three of the rings of vapor spun into intense light; raced around each other. From the screen behind us grew a radiance that held within itself all spectrums—not only those seen, but those unseen by man's eyes. It waxed and waxed, brilliant and ever more brilliant, all suffusing, passing through me as day streams through a window pane!

The enclosing facets burst into a blaze of coruscations, and in each sparkling panel I saw our image, shaken and torn like pennants in a whirlwind. I turned to look, was stopped by the handmaiden's swift command: "Turn not, on your life!"

The radiance behind me grew; was a rushing tempest of light in which I was but the shadow of a shadow. I heard, but not with my ears—nay, with mind itself—a vast roaring. An ordered tumult of sound that came hurling from the outposts of space; approaching—rushing—hurricane out of the heart of the cosmos—closer, closer. It wrapped itself about us with unearthly mighty arms.

And briliant, even more brilliant, streamed the radiance through us.

The faceted walls dimmed; in front of me they melted, diaphanously, like a gelatinous wall in a blast of flame. Through their vanishing, under the torrent of driving light, the unthinkable, impalpable tornado, I began to move, slowly—then ever more swiftly!

Still the roaring grew; the radiance streamed. Ever faster we went. Cutting down through the length, the *extension* of me, dropped a wall of rock, forshortened, clenched close. I caught a glimpse of the elfin gardens; they whirled, contracted, dwindled into a thin—*slice*—of color that was a part of me. Another wall of rock shrunk into a thin wedge through which I flew, and that at once took its place within me, like a card slipped beside those others!

Flashing around me, and from Lakla and O'Keefe, were nimbuses of flickering scarlet flames. And alway the steady hurling forward, appallingly mechanical.

ANOTHER barrier of rock, a gleam of white waters incorporating themselves into my—*drawing out*—even as were the flowered moss lands, the slicing, rocky wall—still another rampart of cliff, dwindling instantly into the vertical plane of those others. Our flight checked; we seemed to hover within, then to sway onward slowly, cautiously.

A mist danced ahead of me, a mist that grew steadily thinner. We stopped, wavered. The mist cleared.

I looked out into translucent, green distances; shot with swift, prismatic gleamings; waves and pulsings of luminosity like midday sun glow through green, tropic

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waters; dancing, scintillating veils of sparkling atoms that flew, hither and yon, through depths of nebulous splendor!

And Lakla and Larry and I were, I saw, like shadow shapes upon a smooth breast of stone twenty feet or more above the surface of this place. A surface spangled with tiny white blossoms gleaming wanly through creeping veils of phosphorescence like smoke of noon fire. We were shadows, and yet we had substance. We were incorporated with, a part of, the rock—and yet we were living flesh and blood. We stretched—nor will I qualify this—we stretched through mile upon mile of space that weirdly enough gave at one and the same time an absolute certainty of immense horizontal lengths and a vertical concentration that contained nothing of length, nothing of space whatever. We stood there upon the face of the stone, and still we were here within the faceted oval before the screen of radiance!

"Steady!" It was Lakla's voice, and not beside me there, but at my ear close before the screen. "Steady, Goodwin! And—see!"

The sparkling haze cleared. Enormous reaches stretched before me. Shimmering up through them, and as though growing in some medium thicker than air, was mass upon mass of verdune. Fruiting trees and trees laden with pale blossoms, arbors and bowers of pallid blooms, like that sea fruit of oblivion—grapes of Lethe—that cling to the tide-swept walls of the caverns of the Hebrides.

Through them, beyond them, around and about them, drifted and eddied a horde. Great as that with which Tamerlane swept down upon Rome, vast as the myriads which Genghis Khan had rolled upon the califs. Men and women and children, clothed in tatters, half nude and wholly naked. Slant-eye Chinese, sloe-eyed Malays, islanders black and brown and yellow. Fierce-faced warriors of the Solomons with grizzled locks fantastically bedizened. Papuans, feline Javans, Dyaks of hill and shore; hook-nosed Phoenicians, Romans, straight-browed Greeks, and Vikings centuries beyond their lives. Scores of the black-haired Murians; white faces of our own Westerners—men and women and children—drifting, eddying. Each stamped with that mingled horror and rapture, eyes filled with ecstasy and terror entwined marked by God and devil in embrace—the seal of the Shining One—the dead-alive: the lost ones!

The loot of the Dweller!

Soul-sick, I gazed. They lifted to us visages of dread; they swept down toward us; glaring upward—a bank against which other and still other waves of faces rolled, were checked, paused. Until, as far as I could see—they were like billows piled upon an ever-growing barrier—they stretched beneath us, staring, staring!

Now there was a movement, far, far away; a concentrating of the lambency. The dead-alive swayed, oscillated, separated, forming a long lane against whose outskirts they crowded with avid, hungry insistence.

First only a luminous cloud, then a whirling pillar of splendors through the lane came—the Shining One. As it passed, the dead-alive swirled in its wake like leaves behind a whirlwind, eddying, twisting. And as the Dweller raced by them, brushing them with its spiralings and tentacles, they shone forth with unearthly, awesome gleamings—like vessels of alabaster in which wicks flare suddenly. And when it had passed they closed behind it, staring up at us once more.

The Dweller paused beneath us.

Out of the drifting ruck swam the body of Throckmartin! Throckmartin, my friend, to find whom I had gone to the pallid moon door; my friend whose call I had so laggardly followed. On his face was the Dweller's dreadful stamp; the lips were bloodless; the eyes were wide, lucent, something like pale phosphorescence gleaming within them—and soulless.

HE STARED straight up at me, unwinking, unrecognizing. Pressing against his side was a woman, young and gentle, and lovely—lovely even through

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the mask of horror and joy that lay upon her face. And her wide eyes, like Throckmartin's, gleamed with the lurking, unholy fires. She pressed against him closely; though the hordes kept up the faint churning, these two kept ever together, as though bound by unseen fetters.

And I knew the girl for Edith, his wife, who in vain effort to save him had cast herself into the Dweller's embrace!

"Throckmartin!" I cried. "Throckmartin! I'm here! Courage, man!"

Did he hear? I know now, of course, he could not.

But then I waited, hope striving to break through the nightmare hands that gripped my heart.

Their wide eyes never left me. There was another movement about them, others pushed past them; they drifted back, swaying, eddying—and still staring were lost in the awful throng.

Vainly I strained my gaze to find them again, to force some sign of recognition, some awakening of the clean life we know from them. But they were gone. Try as I would I could not see them—nor Stanton and the northern woman named Thora who had been the first of that tragic party to be taken by the Dweller.

"Throckmartin!" I cried again, despairingly. My tears blinded me.

I felt Lakla's light touch.

"Steady," she commanded, pityingly. "Steady, Goodwin. You cannot help them now! Steady and—watch!"

Below us the Shining One had paused—spiraling, swirling, vibrant with all its transcendent, devilish beauty; had paused and was contemplating us. Now I could see clearly that nucleus, that core shot through with flashing veins of radiance, that ever-shifting shape of glory through the shroudings of shimmering, misty plumes, throbbing lacy opalescenses, vaporous spiralings of prismatic fantom fires.

Steady over it hung the seven little moons of amethyst, of saffron, of emerald and azure and silver, or rose of life and moon white. They poised themselves like a diadem—calm, serene, immobile — and down from them into the Dweller, piercing plumes and swirls and spirals, ran countless tiny strands, radiations, finer than the finest spun thread of spider's web, gleaming filaments through which seemed to run—power—from the seven globes. Like—yes, that was it—miniatures of the seven torrents of moon flame that poured through the septichromatic, high crystals in the Moon Pool's chamber roof.

Swam out of the coruscating haze the Dweller's—face!

Both of man and woman it was, like some ancient, androgynous deity of Etruscan fanes long dust, and yet neither woman nor man. Human and inhuman; seraphic and sinister; benign and malefic—and still no more of these four than is flame, which is beautiful whether it warms or devours, or wind whether it feathers the trees or shatters them, or the wave which is wondrous whether it caresses or kills.

Subtly, undefinably it was of our world and of one not ours. Its lineaments flowed from another sphere, took fleeting familiar form, and as swiftly withdrew whence they had come. Something amorphous, unearthly—as of unknown, unheeding, unseen gods rushing through the depths of star-hung space; and still of our own earth, with the very soul of earth peering out from it, caught within it—and in some—unholy—way debased.

It had eyes. Eyes that were now shadows darkening within its luminosity like veils falling, and falling, opening windows into the unknowable; deepening into softly glowing blue pools, blue as the Moon Pool itself; then flashing out, and this only when the—face—bore its most human resemblance, into twin stars large almost as the crown of little moons; and with that same baffling suggestion of peep-holes into a world untrodden, alien, perilous to man!

And once more the tempest of mingled terror and joy, of ineffable yearning to leap into the radiant folds, of insupportable urge to flee from them that Throckmartin had described, and that I had felt once before had swept through me.

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"Steady!" came Lakla's voice; her body leaned against mine.

I gripped myself, my brain steadied. I looked again. And I saw that of body, at least body as we know it, the Shining One had none. Nothing but the throbbing, pulsing core streaked with lightning veins of rainbows; and around this, never still, sheathing it, the swirling, glorious veilings of its hell and heaven born radiance.

So the Dweller stood—and gazed.

Then up toward us swept a reaching, questing spiral!

Under my hand Lakla's shoulder quivered; dead-alive and their master vanished. I danced, flickered, *within* the rock; felt a swift sense of shrinking, of withdrawal; slice upon slice the carded walls of stone, of silvery waters, of elfin gardens slipped from me as cards are withdrawn from a pack; one by one—slipped, wheeled, flattened and lengthened out as I passed through them and they passed from me.

Gasping, shaken, weak, I stood *all* within the faceted oval chamber; arm still about the handmaiden's white shoulder; Larry's hand still clutching her girdle.

The roaring, impalpable gale from the cosmos was retreating to the outposts of space—was still; the intense, streaming, flooding radiance lessened—died.

"Now have you beheld," said Lakla, "and well you trod the road. And now shall you hear, even as the Silent Ones have commanded, what the Shining One is—and how it came to be."

The steps flashed back; the doorway into the chamber opened.

TO BE CONCLUDED

"I want a better-looking shave—
A blade priced so I really save!"
"The Thin Gillette, men are agreed,
Gives greater comfort, too—and speed!"
4 for 10c
8 for 19c
THIN
Gillette
BLADES
Made of
easy-flexing steel
hard enough to cut glass!
The Thin Gillette Blade Is Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

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The Belated Tears of Louis Marcel

By PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

He was a hardened criminal, but Death revealed the soul that Life denied

I

THERE was a slight shock of consciousness, such as one experiences when emerging from a brown study or a profound sleep, and Louis Marcel heard, as if for the first time, the oceanic surge and clamor of a vast crowd.

"What has happened?" he asked himself, silently.

He lay there and listened, trying to understand. Words reached him that were both sinister and gay, like the things that float on the surface of a flood— "Adieu!" "Death!" "Well done!" "Terror!" But these were mere fragments awash in the rumble of miscellaneous cheering, of hoots and laughter.

Even while he was collecting these thoughts, trying to piece them together in some sort of an explanation, he had a disquieting sense of having heard his own name. There it was again.

"Good-by, Louis! Good-by, old man! Louis! Louis is dead!"

And there came another huge surge, like a universal laugh, or sob, or cheer, he couldn't tell which. It was a roar—the roar of the Paris mob when exalted.

"Bon Dieu!" he murmured. "Something was happening down there!"

He was fully awake now, and listening with passionate attention. Who was this Louis who was dead? Before he could formulate as much as a guess, he heard his name once more, this time complete—"Louis Marcel!" There could be no doubt of it whatsoever. Yet he remained incredulous, eerily amazed.

"That's strange!" he said to himself. "Here I am, safe in my bed; and down there a crowd clamors that I am dead. Or—aha—is it that there is another Louis Marcel?"

It needed no reflection to convince him that there must be another Louis Marcel in Paris. It was a common name. And yet, somehow, the conviction failed to pacify him. He had a vague but overwhelming certainty that he was the man who was meant, none other. Besides, there was something else. The crowd was clamoring not simply about Louis Marcel, but about "Louis Marcel, the something or other of Montrouge!" And he himself was Louis Marcel, the something or other of Montrouge.

"'Tis true," said Louis, "that I have lived in Montrouge all my life, that I became celebrated there, that I am the only one about whom a crowd would bellow like that. I was—now what was I?"

HIS memory skipped back, but refused to come forward, and he had his first definite twinge of nightmare. He had become celebrated in Montrouge. He had become the "something or other of Montrouge"; what, he couldn't remember at all. He strove to understand what the crowd was saying, and bent himself again to listen with the most avid interest.

There was nothing but detached words, the rags and tatters of sentences—"Tragedy"—"Stoic to the end"—"Torrent of blood"—something like that. But over these there was gradually and swiftly roll-

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ing a new tidal wave of sound, as hundreds and thousands of voices began to howl the same thing:

"Louis Marcel is dead! Ow-oo! Ow-oo! Louis Marcel is dead!"

He tried to think, tried to concentrate his mind, made all those groping efforts at reason common to men when confronted with something they cannot understand. He was perfectly calm about it, although he could not free himself from the impression that something impended, something sad and awesome. As best he could, he reassured himself.

He was lying down. It was dark. He was warm and comfortable. Therefore, he must be in his own bed.

But—last night?

Apart from the vague recollection that he had been distressed about something, that he had been looking forward to something, he couldn't remember.

"Is it that I committed suicide?" he asked himself.

He lay there for a while and meditated on this possibility. Then he rejected it. If he had committed suicide, he wouldn't have taken all Paris into his confidence. Nor would all Paris be there now, shouting about it.

Suicides were becoming common. Not even those who jump from the Eiffel Tower got much attention any more. Besides, he had never meditated suicide.

The sea of voices had become choppy again, had split up into an infinity of cries and hoots that he could not understand. Perhaps those earlier impressions of his had been mistaken. Yet what was this strange and insistent spell of doom that seemed to be brooding about him? He heard a hauntingly unnatural voice, close at his side, which seemed to say:

"It is done."

Then this voice was obliterated by the roar of the crowd, once more rising in the refrain he had already heard. He listened to it with a queer mingling of mirth and fright:

"Ow-oo!" "Ow-oo!" "Louis Marcel est mort!"

LOUIS experienced a little gust of uncanny sickness. There was no mistaking it. That was the voice of the Paris mob! He himself had been in mobs, many a time, and had helped to swell the wolfish cry.

"Mon dieu!" he exclaimed. "Is it that the mob is right, and that I am dead? Evidently no! This is a nightmare, and I must wake myself up."

He sought to pinch himself, but the nightmare beset him so thickly that he might as well have tried to pinch himself with boxing gloves. He recalled his alarm clock, which always stood on a night-table at the head of the bed. If he pressed the spring, it would strike the hour. But the clock was not there. Even the table itself was gone. He determined to open his eyes. Whether he opened them or not it wasn't possible to say. In any case he saw nothing but gray fog, static, opaque.

"This has gone far enough!" he said.

The hooting of the mob was making him desperate. He gave a kick, two of them; but no feeling came from either of his legs. Indeed, it was as if he had no legs. The impression was oddly similar to the one he had experienced when he wanted to touch the alarm-clock. Then it had been as if he had no arms. It was clear that if he wanted to get rid of his nightmare he must regain control of his body.

"I'll turn over," he grunted.

But, as he carried out this resolve, his nightmare took a still more aggravating form. He was strangely without weight. His whole body seemed to have zipped over as lightly as a cotton thread, and he was lying on his face. To test the sensation, he summoned his will to turn again; and this time he rolled over and over, deft and swift, like a billiard-ball. He checked himself, face upward, breathless, listening.

"Louis Marcel is dead. Ow-oo! Ow-oo! Louis Marcel is dead!"

That was the refrain from the crowd. It was a composite roar like the roar of surf; and then, through it all, once more came that nearer voice. It intoned a mellow chant, gentle, noble; and yet when

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Louis comprehended the words, he was more troubled than by anything he had hitherto heard.

"De profundis—clamavi—ad—te—Domine—"

It was the prayer of the dead. Louis Marcel had never been a religious man. He had seldom entered a church; but he was familiar with that stately litany, as men are familiar with the words of some ancient cradle-song. This was the cradle-song of dead workmen, dead bishops, dead millionaires, and it was echoing over and over again in his brain:

"De profundis—de profundis—"

Only the congregation, instead of coming out with the usual response, continued to howl in chorus the words he had already heard. It was inexplicable, ghoulish!

II

LOUIS made a supreme effort to hurl himself out of bed and bring his chimera to an end that way. Impossible! His body was as indifferent to his will as so much air. He was a man of transporting passions. He had never acknowledged restraint of any kind; but now he was in the grip of something that restrained him utterly.

He summoned his powers, like a wrestler who was momentarily baffled. It was almost dawn, he judged, by the gray light; and foggy, with a peculiar smell and taste of Paris fog, metallic, saline, like the smell and taste of blood. And the fog must have blanketed the crowd out there, howling like so many revolutionists when marching along the boulevards intent on the overthrow of an unpopular ministry.

"But if I am dead," Louis queried tremulously and curiously, "how did I die? Why is there such a crowd, why the demonstration? Or is it that this is some damnable joke?"

His brain was responsive to his will, even if his body was not, and his mind raced from conjecture to conjecture, building up and knocking down with all that he possessed of logic and information. His knowledge of the Paris mob was vast and intimate; and now, automatically, he scanned the possibilities.

If he had been killed in a strike riot, the crowd would have bellowed like that. If he had been bowled over by a tramcar, it might have done the same, but there was a hint of something more tragic still, more stirring. It was maddening, intolerable. If he could only remember!

"They remarked that I was stoic until the end," said Louis. "Evidently I was not a poltroon. Is it that I died a hero? How was I dressed? It would make Odette blush with shame if—if—"

At thought of his wife he forgot himself utterly. How often she had asked him to put on his Sunday suit when faring forth; had begged him to shave, to smooth his hair! It was she who had always brushed his clothes for him, and blacked his shoes. Just to think of it submerged him in tenderness and poignant yearning.

In spite of his emotions, however, his active brain suggested that there was succor that had never failed him, would not fail him now. He tried to call her.

"Odette!"

No sound came. He tried again.

"Odette! Help!"

His voice was like the fall of a forest tree where there are no ears to hear—something that could be crashingly loud yet is soundless, absolutely soundless.

He blinked at the grayness, gulped at the silence.

Ordinarily Odette slept in the next room, with Marie, while little Paul slept here at his side. Were they hearing the solemn prayer and the clamor of the crowd? He sought to touch Paul. He was aware of a breath, a zone of tepid heat; but there was no contact of any kind. The thought that he was in some way shut off from those he loved gripped him as insistently as the fog.

It wasn't what might have happened to him that mattered. It was what might happen to his wife and children if they didn't have him to depend upon. This thought obsessed him. It was possible that

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he had been stricken with paralysis. It was possible that something had happened to his brain. But how about them?

He was making frantic efforts to remember whether they were provided for, whether there was some friend or relative who would look out for them, whether this thing that had happened to him had been foreseen. He was in an agony of doubt, and it was changing into an agony of grief. He couldn't remember, and yet at some points his memory flickered up with pitiful brilliance.

He discerned all manner of minute details, such as the hole in little Paul's left shoe, the blue veins in Marie's white temple. His wife's face flashed upon him, young and beautiful, though pinched and hollow-eyed; appealing in its expression of suffering patience; the face of one who is famished but brave.

"Odette—for the love of God!"

The only answer was an echoing *"Requiem—requiem aeternam"* and the infernal chorus of the mob, "Ow-oo! Ow-oo! Louis Marcel is dead!"

And still Odette was just there, looking at him as she had looked at him once before on a certain occasion, with fear in her eyes, with her disheveled brown hair waving down over a thin, white shoulder. He was stricken to the soul with tenderness and remorse.

Mon Dieu! Why did she look like that? Had he made her unhappy? Had he done something to hurt her?

The possibility of such a thing filled him with horror. It was true that he had always been of a violent nature, that he had never restrained himself; but to see Odette like that was too much. He craved for prayer. He craved for the power of God. His grief was so poignant that it became an indescribable ache. But he still continued to struggle.

"Oh, Mother of Christ," he begged, "for her sake, for her sake!"

But the gray fog merely gripped him the tighter with a soft, invisible hand. As if satisfied, the crowd was moving away. Its voice reached him more and more faintly, like the bourdon of tolling bells on a day of public mourning. Were they mourning for him? Fainter yet came the voice that had intoned the litany:

"Kyrie eleison!" Lord have pity!

And it may have been this, or that cry of his own that he had sent up, but Louis Marcel was touched with a ineffable breath of hope. He surrendered. Only, on Odette's account, he wept.

III

THROUGH the drab morning the crowds trailed away, and Paris assailed its daily work again. To-day there was this thing to talk about. To-morrow there would be something else. But the newsboys—most of them old men—slipped and slopped through the grimy streets and shouted their extras and did a lively trade.

"La Patrie! La Patrie! The end of Louis Marcel!"

"Enfin," cried Pierre to Paul, and Marcel to Etienne, as they bought the papers and hurried on their way to work, "the Terror of Montrouge has met his just deserts!"

They read the details with manifest satisfaction—how this man, who had murdered his family in a fit of rage, had mounted the guillotine, "stoic to the end"; how he had looked out indifferently over the morbid, cheering crowd, had given these honest people their last look at a face so brutal that no one could see it without a shiver of dread; how the mob had began to chant its "Ow-oo!" even as the knife fell and the aged almoner bent over his crucifix.

"But I tell you," cried Dujardin, of the *Matin,* to the other journalists who were breakfasting with him in the Café du Commerce, "I tell you, I saw it with my own eyes. Don't tell me that there is no life after death! Me, I tell you—me, Emil Dujardin—I have seen."

"What hast thou seen, my son?" asked Maurice, of the *Petit Parisien,* as he dipped his roll into his coffee and winked good naturedly at his colleagues.

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They had all been present at the execution that morning. They were light-hearted and pleasantly cynical, and they found Dujardin's emotions highly diverting.

"Yes, what did you see?" they echoed.

"It was after the knife fell," said Dujardin, "and the almoner and I leaned over him. The almoner saw it, too, and called it the grace of God."

"Oh, you mean when the poor devil gave that jerk—"

"He means," said Maurice, "when Louis Marcel's head turned over like a billiard-ball."

"Mais, non," Dujardin insisted, as his voice became still more intense, and sank until it was little louder than a whisper. "It was after that. You others did not see. Only the almoner and I were near enough, and M. Deibler, the executioner. Listen! We've all of us written about Marcel's brutal face. 'Twas true enough; but when his head stopped rolling, and that face of his was turned up to the sky, the expression had changed, the brutality was gone. It was changed still more, even while we looked, become gentle, wistful, beautiful."

The journalists were silent as Dujardin looked from face to face. Paris ground through the narrow street outside on its way to work. The newsboys barked their wares.

"The almoner called it the grace of God," said Dujardin softly; "and I believe it. For on the lips of Louis Marcel—and him already dead—there came a smile; and from his eyes, my friends, there came—a flow of tears!"

WHO CAN GUESS?

THE sun is but a little swinging ball;
The hills are tiny, and the seas are small;
The sky is not so lofty, after all.

But see! This man we're hanging—in him lies,
No matter what the guilt for which he dies,
A living soul, and who can guess its size?

—*Mary Carolyn Davies*

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"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 151, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 151, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

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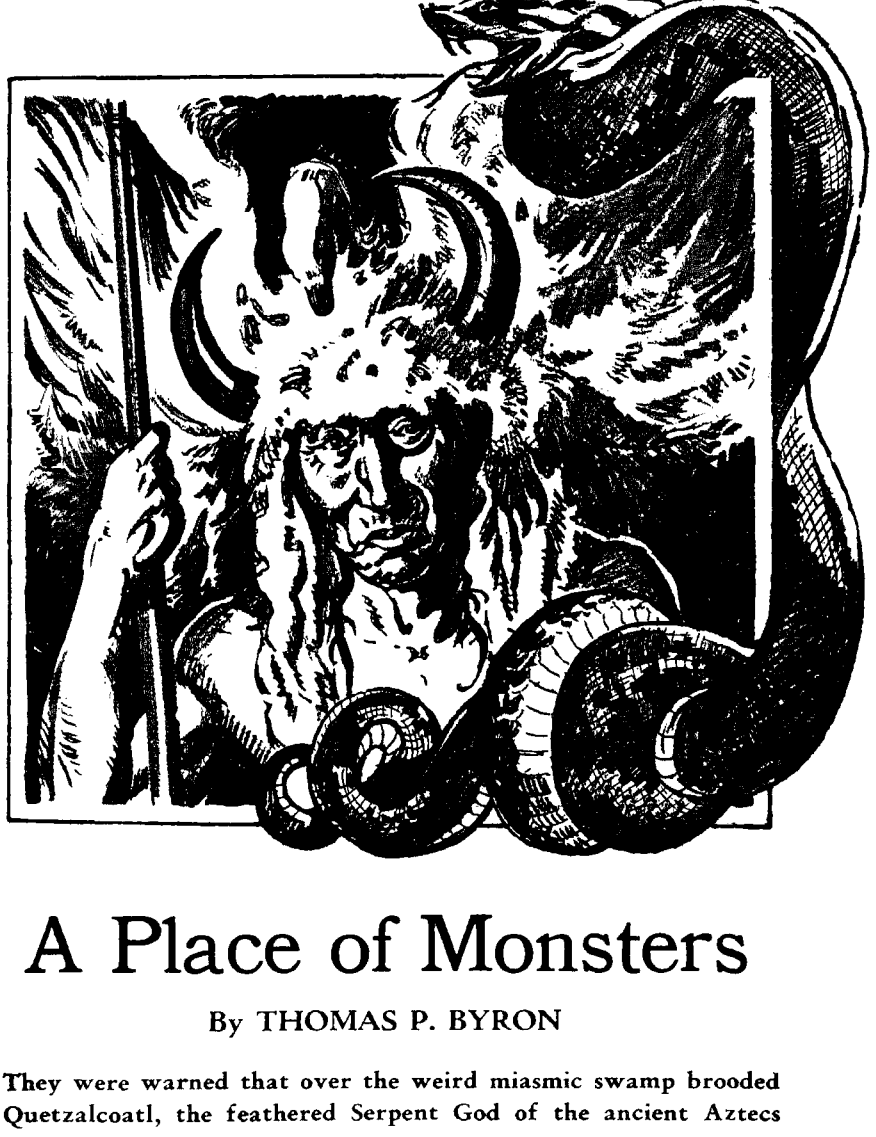

A Place of Monsters

By THOMAS P. BYRON

They were warned that over the weird miasmic swamp brooded Quetzalcoatl, the feathered Serpent God of the ancient Aztecs

I

IT WAS a trail through the tree-tops—a rift in the forest through which the sky stretched straight away as far as the eye could see, like a blue band on a dark-green canopy. When we found it we were hopelessly lost in the maze of jungle that lies between the two republics; so we followed the strip of sky that blazed through the ragged gap, in the hope that it would lead us somewhere, and for two days it had led us as straight to the north-east as one might go.

Don Innocencio called it The Sky-Trail, but the Railroader re-christened it The Trail of a Thousand and One Torments. They were there—the torments—in biblical

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legions, buzzing their endless song and gorging themselves on our blood. Each one was barbed, each one was poisonous, famished—insatiable.

We could see them coming to the feast in dense clouds; there were a thousand and one varieties, and a million and one of each variety. They put the jungle venom into our veins, too, and made us part of the great scheme. We were no longer men, but, with our swollen, distorted features, were become monstrosities that Nature had built in a debauch, as she had created the rest of the place.

Every bush, every leaf, every atom of that cunning, creeping jungle was alive. It was one vast, palpitating thing, of which we were a part and you could see its life-blood flow in a mammoth, blighting current such as you may have noticed in examining a bit of protoplasm under a microscope.

Lars called it a place of ghosts. At times it fairly rang with noise, and then again it was weirdly silent. We could hear the cries of birds and the roar of beasts, but they hushed at our approach. We could hear great monsters crashing away ahead of us, but never once did we catch a glimpse of them.

It gave us shivers—this abject fright, of which we were the cause. It was as if there were some horrible thing about us that we ourselves could not see. We looked at one another suspiciously—to search out who might be the accursed one.

We had joined forces back at Lake Peten the day that a white man staggered in from the jungle dying of fever and some strange poison. He had raved of things that crawled upon him and stung him, of things that chased him and coiled about him, and—of an island of pearls in the middle of a swamp.

And clenched in his hand when he died were five enormous pearls.

So we five were hunting for the island.

THE Railroader was an American tramp; Lars, a runaway sailor, who looked like a Viking; Don Innocencio, a manikin carved from a grain of coffee and steeped into animation; the Enigma was a short, fat, hairless sphinx; and I—I was myself.

Toward the evening of the second day we were fighting our way through the brush, when the Railroader, who was leading, sang out.

"There's an open space ahead," he said. "I believe we are coming out somewhere."

Full of hope, we struggled on through a dense thicket, and emerged into a blinding sunshine, where the whole world was spread out before us. We all blinked and stared silently.

We had happened upon a great, gorgeous-colored, prehistoric monster lying in his lair.

The lair was a gray, loathsome swamp—a fen such as might have produced huge reptiles when the earth's crust was still hot and steaming.

The monster was an island gorgeous with the flaring colors of tropical vegetation, and it lay on the edge of the swamp. A jagged mass of white rock formed a hideous head; elsewhere it was covered with arborescent flora of dazzling hues, with stripes of green grass running over it. A great wing stretched out into the swamp, and off to our left was a long tail that broke into a fork at the end.

It looked like a great beast that had lain sad-colored and dormant in the fen that had given him birth, and then, chameleon-like, had shone in a thousand glaring hues when the first sun burst through the bank of clouds that encircled the steaming earth. Through a thin mist that hung over the swamp it seemed to tremble, as if it breathed and shook itself now and then. Only the fierce glare of the sun and the cloudless sky gave the lie to the primordial aspect of the monster and its dank, gray lair.

"It's a place of snakes and alligators," said the Railroader.

"The swamp—yes," said Don Innocencio; "but the island is a place of gorgeous things. Perhaps it's the island of pearls."

The Enigma pointed. Beyond the island

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was a silent, gray lake, on the farther shore of which a forest stood down to the water's edge. At a break in this, spirals of smoke, clearly distinguishable through the mist over the swamp, rose in the air. "There are men there," he said.

Lars was staring, with a strange look on his face.

"What is it, Lars?" I queried.

"Is it a mirage?" he asked in a troubled voice.

"Not the island—the tree! Is it a mirage?"

We all looked. At the head of the island, among the white rocks, a single, enormous, heavily fronded palm stood out green and feathery against the sky.

It was the only tree of any size on the island.

"It's no mirage—it's a palm, all right," said the Railroader. "What about it, anyway?"

"It is alive," answered Lars.

We burst into laughter, and then stopped short and stared.

"Seems to me I can see something bright there," muttered the Railroader.

"You see the bushes," replied the Enigma.

"It's even brighter than the bushes, and it seems to move."

"The mist from the swamp causes that. The island seems to move, too."

"It's alive," insisted Lars, and he and the Railroader continued to gaze at it uneasily.

"We'll soon find out," said the Enigma. "The swamp is full of open and dry places. It's a regular network of trails, and it will be no trouble to cross it. We have two hours before sundown, and we'll rest on that green grass to-night. There ought to be fresh water there."

"And pearls," I added.

We picked up our packs and started, Lars holding back.

"I don't like it," he said as I passed him. "It looks as if there were dead men there."

"The jungle is breaking your nerve, Lars," I answered, laughing.

AS THE Enigma had said, the swamp was composed of paths of hard, sun-dried mud that crossed and crisscrossed in every direction between sections of slimy morass and stagnant water, where grew tall reeds and great clumps of saw-grass that cut the clothing like razors.

Now and then we saw mottled snakes gliding in the reeds, and the place was full of mournful, drab-colored little birds that ran about crazily—here and there and everywhere, like Chinese mice—as if they were searching for something. They never rested, nor did they pay the slightest attention to us, and their feet made a curious soft pattering on the hard mud.

The grass and reeds were higher than our heads, and only occasionally could we get a glimpse of the island or the jungle we had quitted; but we turned to left or right as we judged it necessary to bring us to our goal.

At the end of three-quarters of an hour we came upon a *cul-de-sac,* and another deep, silent, mud-colored pool.

We tried more roads, with the same result, working feverishly, and without due judgment in the effort to get across before nightfall; and soon we were so thoroughly lost that it would have been a matter of equal difficulty to gain either the island or our starting-point again. The paths were so narrow—with the reeds and grass swishing in our faces—and they were all exactly alike.

Suddenly we emerged upon the shore of the lake perhaps a quarter of a mile from the head of the island. The open water reached straight from us to the white rocks, and beyond to the break in the forest, where the smoke was rising.

The island thrust another wing out into the lake on the other side, giving it more the appearance of the monster than ever, and we could see that it was not really an island, since there was no open water between it and the swamp.

"The palm-tree!" ejaculated Lars.

We stared at it in silence.

The last rays of the sun sinking in the swamp glittered on it, and all at once the

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top of the tree seemed to quiver, unfold, and shake itself violently, shining in the most gorgeous colors. And then from across the lake there came booming a distant roar, as from a multitude of throats.

It was faint, wild, full of a brazen ring, and seemed somehow to give one the picture of lank forms and working throats.

"There's many a throat off yonder," said the Railroader slowly. "I'm glad we've got plenty of cartridges."

As he spoke he drew his hand across his own throat, and I saw that his face was white.

"I wish we had a boat," said Lars, still staring at the palm-tree. "We could be at the island in fifteen minutes, and see what is in the palm."

"We might paddle our way thither on a log, if we can find one," I suggested.

"No—no!" cried Don Innocencio. "That gray water may be alive with reptiles. It would not do to trust ourselves to it."

"We can't stay here all night."

"The last pool we came to had an open space sixty feet or so across," said the Enigma. "Suppose we go there. We can sit in the middle."

"That's the trick," approved the Railroader. "I, for one, don't want to go exploring about this swamp at night, nor yet to stay here with the saw-grass slapping my face. It's too easy for things to spring out at us."

This was the unanimous opinion, and we were back at the spot in a jiffy.

It was as round as a bull-ring, dried by the sun to a consistent hardness, and bordered on a small pool that we tried with a long reed and found to be bottomless, as far as our measuring apparatus was concerned.

The reeds and grass about were not so high, however, and we could see the island plainly when standing. The Railroader had brought a canteen of water from the lake. It was fresh and sweet, in spite of its warmness and grayish color; and before we had finished our short meal twilight was upon us.

"This is a sad place," said Lars. "Saddest of all at twilight. I am curious about the palm-tree. I will not be able to rest until I find out what it was."

He had risen and gone to the edge of the open space, and stood perhaps a dozen feet from the saw-grass, looking toward the island. In the dim light his form, silhouetted against the sky, seemed gigantic.

Suddenly a long, dim bulk swung like a flash from out the reeds and struck him fairly in the side with a crunch, knocking him twenty feet away to the edge of the pool. The thing reared up until it seemed to tower in the sky, fell its whole length forward, and was upon his crumpled form.

The Enigma was shooting on the second, and Don Innocencio and I were only a breath later, screaming to each other as we fired. Some of our bullets went home, I'm sure.

But the creature had yawned half its length and seized the sailor. There was a great splash, and only the agitated waters of the pool remained to show where man and monster had disappeared.

The Railroader cried out: "What was it?"

"It was the devil!" chattered Don Innocencio.

"It was a monster crocodile," said the Enigma grimly. "It struck him with its tail and knocked him to the edge of the pool. Then it seized him and plunged in."

"Can't we do anthing?" cried the Railroader desperately.

"We can only stay in the middle of the open space," answered Don Innocencio. "The swamp may be alive with them. We had best sit quiet here—and back to back."

We followed his example, and in a moment more the last streaks of light were gone and it was as black as pitch.

"LISTEN!" whispered the Enigma. "The place is alive!"

A light wind had sprung up and rustled in the reeds like the hissing of a thousand serpents. We could hear things crashing in the rushes, and the splash of heavy bodies in the water.

Lone night-birds called shrilly now and

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then, and all about we could hear the endless pattering of the drab-colored birds. It was a ghostly sort of clamor, and it was soul-shriveling work sitting there, thinking that the darkness was full of cunning monsters waiting for us to come within the sweep of their mighty tails.

The Railroader was the first to break the silence.

"Poor Lars got his," he whispered.

"It was a blow that would have killed an ox," replied Don Innocencio. "They can swing their tails like lightning. Like enough, it almost cut him in two. Those scaly tails are like knives."

"What was that?" demanded the Railroader suspiciously.

From the pool had come a soft, gurgling sound.

"Bubbles," said the Enigma sententiously.

We understood, and shuddered.

The thing was tearing our companion to pieces on the bottom of the pool and devouring him.

II

WE WAITED for the moon to rise. It was on the wane and was due to come up about ten o'clock.

I was facing the east and the island, and over the tops of the reeds I could see the sky glow faintly and then brighten into a heavy red as if all the world were afire beyond and one could see the blaze through heavy banks of smoke

The Railroader, who was back to back with me, suddenly rose to his feet. The rest of us heard it, too, and Don Innocencio and I were on our feet, clutching our carbines.

It was a steady flapping that seemed to circle about us, sometimes near and sometimes far.

Suddenly a draft of wind struck me full in the face. To my raw-edged nerves the shock was like that of a blow. I dodged instinctively and Don Innocencio and I tumbled together upon the Enigma, who had not risen.

While we struggled in a heap we heard the Railroader's voice in a scream of terror. "Hold me! Shoot!" He cried. "It's got me—"

The words ended in a tiny gurgle. We could hear something dragging heavily through the reeds. And then all was as silent as the grave—even the swamp had ceased its clamor as if to listen.

We clutched each other and shouted to the Railroader, and at the sound of our voices, the swamp, as if reassured, began its noise again.

We struck lights and peered about the open space. It was vacant as ever.

The water of the pool was silent and unruffled, the mud on the edge was clawed up where the crocodile had dragged Lars with him, and the sailor's hat lay near the edge. But the Railroader had vanished as completely as if the earth had opened up and swallowed him.

"Better sit down," advised the Enigma. "It may come back."

"Yes," whispered Don Innocencio. "I was knocked flat by something—a wing I think. And while we were struggling on the ground I was bitten on the foot by something."

We struck more lights and looked about for snakes and examined Don Innocencio's foot. On the instep was a tiny puncture around which the flesh was slightly discolored.

While I held a match the Enigma slashed it with a sharp knife and squeezed as much blood as he might from it. It flowed clear and red, there was no discoloration, and Don Innocencio felt no pain other than from the cut. Whatever it had been had bitten right through the boot.

"It doesn't amount to much," he said at last, and then, shrinkingly: "But what took the Railroader?"

"It was something that flew," answered the Enigma. "It must be what we saw in the palm. We'll shoot it tomorrow."

"No, no. Let's get out of this swamp tomorrow as soon as we can. There's something strange about the place, and I don't want any more of it."

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"We'll settle that tomorrow. But in the meantime we had better keep quiet until the moon rises. It may come back."

We huddled down as close to earth as we could, and watched.

A golden rim had crept up over the rocky head of the island and the swamp seemed to be filled with a luminous pinkish haze that became brighter as the moon, red as blood, slowly rose.

The fronds of the single palm-tree shone against it for a moment like a great spider on a red egg of molten metal, and then—they seemed to twist and contort as if the spider had been shriveled up by the egg's heat and was writhing in his dying agonies.

The agitation lasted for a second, and then ceased as the moon rising higher swung free from the palm and brightened from a sullen red to a whiter hue. And it seemed to me—I knew—somehow—that the Master of the Swamp was back in his perch. He to whom the lank men on the lake shore had shouted a salute at sundown.

The moon broke through the haze all at once and poured a flood of quicksilver over the swamp that seemed to fill every nook, and coat with glistening white every blade and leaf. We could see the reeds sway and bend, and even the drab birds, now white, that pattered about continuously. It was a welcome sight, and the night was robbed of half its terrors.

We stood up and gazed about in every direction, but nothing met our glances save the waving expanse of silver-limned swamp and the dark line of the forest beyond.

"Not a sign of him," said the Enigma at last. "But if it comes back, we will be able to see to shoot, anyway. That is one comfort."

"It won't come back," I said dully.

We sat down again and fell into a silence that was only broken by brief inquiries concerning Don Innocencio's foot, and the monotone of his reassuring reply

Fatigue began to fight with fear and wonder. Now and then I nodded, and I seemed to see Lars and the Railroader fighting with uncanny monsters. They always seemed far away, as if I were watching them through the wrong end of a telescope, and always I roused myself with a start.

I felt Don Innocencio jerk uneasily at times, and I wondered if he, too, were having the same experience.

A dull rage crept into me at the constant strain. I watched the struggle of the two with calm philosophy, and would have closed my eyes upon them in indifference had I not known that it would be all over as soon as I withdrew my gaze. Why did they not give up and have it over with and let me go to sleep?

The monsters in the swamp—the thing in the palm! Let them come! I was tired and was going to close my eyes at any cost. So I closed them.

Then I saw the twain coming back after it was all over—shadows who looked at me with reproachful eyes.

This was the worst of all, and I started up in horror to flee, and found that I was awake and that it was bright day.

IT TOOK me a moment to get free from my cramped position and look about. The sun had risen over the island, scintillating in all the colors of the rainbow; the swamp steamed like a caldron. The Enigma was getting food out of his pack, and Don Innocencio was on his feet, staring. Following his gaze I, too, regarded the palm-tree long and carefully.

"There's nothing in it," he said at last.

"How is the foot?" I demanded.

"The least bit swollen, but no pain. It doesn't amount to much."

" 'Twas some insect that crawled in your boot," said the Enigma.

"No, there is a puncture in the boot. Perhaps it was some kind of a thorn, though."

We ate silently. The Enigma was as sphinxlike as ever, but Don Innocencio had gone to a sickly paleness under his dark skin, and it gave him an unhealthy look. His face was drawn, and his large, dark eyes were abnormally great for the rest of him.

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"It was horrible," he said, when we had finished eating.

"Yes," I answered. "The crocodile that took Lars was bad enough—"

We all stared a moment at the pool.

"The other thing is some great, flying thing," said the Enigma. "It roosts in the palm-tree. We'll shoot it, if it appears today."

"I suppose there's no use—" I began.

The Enigma waved his hand.

"I thought I heard something dragging through the bushes at the time, but you can see that not a reed is out of place. I'm afraid there's no use in looking for him."

We all took a drink of *aguardiente* and started. The day was very bright, the sun had burned up the mist, and only a filmy haze through which the island monster was trembling as before hung over the swamp. The strings of smoke were still rising at the break in the forest.

The lake gleamed with a grayish sheen, in the jungle parrots were screaming, but the swamp was silent save for the endless pattering of the sand-colored birds that rushed about frantically in their eternal search for something they were never to find.

We set to work scientifically to find the way to the island.

The first road we tried led us to a point where at a distance of some seventy yards from where we had camped the reeds on both sides were broken down and smashed as if a heavy body had been dragged across struggling. We stopped and looked at each other.

What was coming next?

"See how the reeds are broken," I said. "It came from where we camped and went toward the island."

The Enigma threw down his pack.

"I'm going to have a look in there," he declared.

"I am, too," I replied.

The *don* hung back and we started, pushing the reeds and saw-grass to one side with our guns. It was a regular quicksand where one sank at once over the ankles and continued to sink, if he did not keep moving.

The reeds were thick in the sticky mess, and here and there were clumps of saw-grass that seemed to afford more solid footing, but were too narrow to stand upon.

Suddenly we stopped.

Twenty feet ahead of us on the surface of the terrible, filthy slime there was a white face.

It was the Railroader. His limbs and body were sunk beneath the mud, his tangled yellow hair had caught on a thick broken reed and had kept his head from following.

His face was shrunken to less than half its former size.

It was white—dead-white, wan, and drawn, with the blue veins standing out rugged all over it. He looked as if the last drop of blood had been drawn from his veins, leaving only skin and dry flesh. And yet his face had something calm and peaceful about it.

"It must have been a vampire," said the Enigma slowly.

"Let's get out of here quick." I shuddered.

It was high time.

In the brief instant I had stared at the face I had sunk to my knees. Another moment or two and we had kept the Railroader company.

I had to clutch a bunch of saw-grass and work like mad to free myself, and when the Enigma advanced to loosen the Railroader's hair from the reed, I had to sit on a clump and pull him free from the clinging embrace Otherwise he, too, would have gone down.

When we turned for a last glimpse, the face was gone, the slime was smooth and placid.

III

WE TOLD Don Innocencio of it while we cleaned the filth from our legs.

It had a sweet, nauseating smell and, in spite of his tremors, the little Guatemalteco walked ahead of us to be free from it.

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The very next trail we tried curved and zigzagged about for a while and finally led us straight to the middle of the island, perhaps half a mile from the head. When we emerged from the grassy maze and stood in the clear again, we found that the brilliant colors had dulled marvelously.

In place of the monster of flaming scarlets and pinks and emeralds that sunlight and distance had shown us, we found a long mass of white, quartz-like rock covered with bushes of brown and heather-like purple, and grass of dull green. It was in the shape of a cross, and here and there were detached rocks.

A collection of these last formed the head where stood the palm. It was now hidden from us by a high pinnacle, but we worked our way thither without delay.

The tree was ringed about on three sides by great rocks, on the other was a sheer drop of thirty feet to the lake.

We came upon the place suddenly after passing the rock that cut it off from our view.

The tree was empty; its fronds shone bright green in the sunlight; below, among the rocks, it was rather gloomy. Beneath the tree was a great flat stone. We stepped quickly to the lake-edge.

The water was full of driftwood, logs so water-soaked that only bumps here and there rose above the water; they were as close together as in a mill-pond, and one could have walked about on them with the greatest of ease. There were hundreds of them.

"All the driftwood of the lake must collect here," said Don Innocencio. "There must be a—"

He stopped with a yell, and if the Enigma had not seized him, I believe he would have fallen in the lake.

The Enigma had kicked a stone into the lake, and suddenly each log had become a yawning, red-eyed monster in whose gaping jaws, set with three rows of enormous teeth, the little Guatemalteco might have disappeared bodily.

We all jumped back, and Don Innocencio and I shook like aspens.

"They seem to be expecting us," said the Enigma.

A sudden rage seized him.

"I wish that thing would come back," he snarled. "I want to kill something. If I had cartridges enough, I'd sit here on this rock and never stop shooting as long as there was an alligator in that cursed lake."

"So would I," hissed Don Innocencio.

They glared about for something on which to vent their rage. The *don* ran to the center of the flat rock. Suddenly he uttered a hoarse cry.

"Look! Look!" he babbled.

He was kneeling on the rock, and plunging his hand in a cavity, he brought it up filled with things that glittered white as milk and dropped back again with a musical rattle.

The next instant the three of us were pawing them up in great handfuls and roaring with excitement.

We had found the island of pearls.

The hole in the rock was full of them.

We laughed and cried and talked all at once.

"There's enough of them," stammered Don Innocencio incoherently, "to buy the Five Republics."

And we laughed like madmen at the thought.

The Enigma was the first to come to himself.

"There's a pearl fishery in this lake somewhere," he said slowly, "and this rock is someone's storehouse. Who put them here? Who were the ones that shouted last night at sundown? What was it that—"

"Look there! he broke off suddenly. "Look there!"

From the break in the forest where the smoke was rising a fleet of canoes was coming out toward the island.

IV

WE JAMMED the pearls into a bag, seized our guns, and never ceased running nor stopped to look back until we

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were across the swamp and stood on the edge of the jungle again.

Don Innocencio was limping.

"I am done," he gasped feebly. "My leg has started to swell, and already I can hardly walk."

We stared back at the island a moment and then gave him *aguardiente* and urged him to press on. But before we had made two miles I was obliged to stop and help him. Each time we rested the Enigma poured *aguardiente* into him, and soon he was either drunk or fever-stricken, for he began to rave.

He talked of jungles and swamps and treasure, and declared one moment he was the president of the Five Republics, the next he begged us to take the pearls back. But never once in his madness and gibberish did he cease to struggle on as long as an atom of strength remained to him to get as far as possible from the swamp and the island.

We had walked perhaps six miles when he gave out entirely, so we made a camp where the lianas and other parasites grew thickest about the trees. The place was so shut in that we were invisible twenty feet away, and we had no fear of pursuit, for to find a man in that jungle would have been equal to the task of finding a needle in a haystack.

Don Innocencio's foot was like that of an elephant, huge, discolored.

We washed it with *aguardiente* and water, and then poured liquor into him until he was stupefied, and lay still, breathing heavily. We decided to remain where we were until he was better and then endeavor to make our way back to Petén.

We ate and drank and rested and took turns watching over him until after midnight.

Then, as he lay quiet, and all seemed well, we both fell off to sleep.

I was awakened by a fierce grip on my shoulder, and sprang to my feet, for I had dreamed that the thing that had taken the Railroader had seized me.

The Enigma, wild-eyed, was shaking me, and it was day.

"Gone!" he cried bitterly. "Gone!"

"The pearls!" I gasped.

"Yes, and Don Innocencio."

"Where can he have gone?" I muttered.

"Heaven knows. He is crazy from fear. He has tried to get farther away, and he will wander until he drops, and we will never find him. Who could find a man in this jungle?"

"No," said I. "He has gone back to the island."

"Back to the island! That is just where he would not go. He is mad with fear of the place."

"Nevertheless," I answered calmly, "that is where he has gone."

We gripped our carbines and started out to overtake our mad comrade. He had left his own gun behind him.

We ran and walked by turns, fighting our way through the tangle like eager bloodhounds, stopping to drink each time we came to water, for the country was full of little rivulets that emptied into the swamp. Once the Enigma stopped and pointed to a stone.

It was daubed with a stain, and we knew that Don Innocencio had stepped there with his poisoned foot.

But we did not speak a word until we had broken out of the jungle and could look across the swamp again.

Everything—swamp, island, lake—was quiet; the palm-tree was motionless; nothing was shining or moving there. But away out in the center of the swamp we could see a tiny white speck.

Dazed though he was, Don Innocencio had taken the right trail, and was heading straight for the island.

Hardly stopping for breath, we dashed on with new energy at the sight of him.

V

ALMOST to the island there was a slight rise—a hump in the swamp beyond which the trail—straight for a couple of hundred yards, was girt in by reeds and grass at least ten feet high. Topping this rise we came upon him.

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The squat, white little figure was limping on ever so slowly.

He held the bag of pearls in his hand and toiled on, putting his swollen foot to the ground with a care that told how great must be the agony it caused him.

"Poor devil," I puffed. "He's crazy as a loon. I'm afraid we'll have to use force to get him to go back. It is lucky we overtook him before he reached the island."

"Oh-oh!" gasped the Enigma. "Look!"

Standing in the trail, awaiting Don Innocencio, was an enormously tall and thin Indian. He was naked from the waist up, and stood erect and silent. On his head was a head-dress so enormous that, even were it of feathers, it seemed as if the weight must crush him.

It was a dazzling mass of gorgeous colors, and from it two tremendous wings stretched out into the reeds on each side of the trail.

Don Innocencio sighted the Indian. He dropped his pearls and stood still.

Then he limped toward the waiting one with outstretched hands. His attitude was that of prayer. We stood wondering.

The gorgeous head-dress fluttered, every feather seemed to stand on end, a head raised up from out their midst; quick as a flash something flew out and struck Don Innocencio full in the face—just as a centipede swings its tail over its head to strike.

He dropped like a log and the gorgeous thing shook itself, flapped slowly forward, and lighted on his prone body.

"Shoot!" screamed the Enigma.

He began to fire—the thing screeched once—I saw the feathers drop, and then it flapped across the swamp and perched in the palm-tree.

The Indian had disappeared. Not a sign of him anywhere.

When we reached Don Innocencio he lay where he had fallen, the bag of pearls a short distance away.

He looked up, clear-eyed, into our faces, gasping a single word: "Quetzalcoatl!"

Then he was dead and horrible—his face green, his cheeks bloated.

To inter him was our only thought.

We found a place where the swamp was a quicksand and gave him to it, as we had done with the Railroader, fearing to touch him, looking about, shivering, each moment to regard the thing that still sat in the palm.

The Enigma handed me the bag of pearls. "Do you know who Quetzacoatl was?" he asked.

"An Aztec god," I answered dully. "The Aztec Messiah."

"Yes—a god to whom they offered human sacrifice. They used to open victim's breast with a sharp knife and tear out the still beating heart for the god to snatch. And do you know what the name means?"

I shook my head.

"It means the Feathered Serpent."

VI

"YOU can wait for me or you can go," said the Enigma.

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to kill it."

"No—no!" I cried, seizing him by the arm. "Do not kill it. We have the pearls. Let us go. Let us get away from here."

He shook me off, foaming with fury, threatening me with his gun and eying me fearfully, as if I were as dreadful as the thing itself.

"You may do as you like," he said, "but I am going to kill it, if I have to do so under the eyes of its worshipers, and I will kill you if you meddle with me."

He set off, and I followed him, begging until he threatened me again. After that I still followed, but said nothing and kept at a distance. I knew words were of no use.

He climbed the slope of the island and marched straight up to the head. I could see the thing in the tree shake itself now and then, until finally it disappeared behind the pinnacle of rock.

When we turned the corner of the rocks I was a dozen feet behind the Enigma.

There was the palm-tree, the open space and flat rock below, the lake teeming

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with crocodiles, and the thing—an immense, shapeless bunch of gorgeous plumage that had neither head nor tail nor wings nor feet. The Enigma leveled his carbine.

He could hardly miss so splendid a mark as that immense and bright thing.

With a hoarse cry, I leaped forward to stop him. Too late!

Once—twice—thrice—he fired right into the center of it.

Feathers dropped, and with a screech it dropped from the tree and flapping its great wings desperately, fell into the lake.

I saw it! Ah, Lord! I saw it—and then the water of the lake was lashed into crimson foam where a horde of hideous jaws were tearing a bright-feathered thing to fragments.

The Enigma and I stared, fascinated, and something caused me to look behind.

I tried to scream, but my tongue hung useless in my jaws.

The next instant a squat deformity of a man with a nose like a parrot's beak had seized the Enigma about the waist and leaped into the lake with him.

I could not save him.

The horrid clamor in the water redoubled, and I found myself staring into the eyes of the tall Indian.

He wore no head-dress this time, and I saw that his head was pointed at the top and quite innocent of hair.

His skin was of a mottled copper-color, he had the tiniest of ears that lay close to his head, and his nose was an atom.

His body was abnormally thin, his neck and cheeks enormous. They seemed to bloat up until they were ready to burst, and then shrank until they were sunken and covered with scaly folds of skin.

He was hideous.

Had it not been for that which I read in the depths of his deep-set eyes, I would have thought that he was going to spit poison at me. You have seen a cobra bloat up its hood when enraged—that was how he did it.

I could not take my eyes from his, and he stepped forward until I could count the scales on his neck and feel his breath upon my face. His slender frame writhed and quivered in mortal agony—like a snake dying upon a hot stove, and his eyes looked into mine with a sad reproachful glance that made my heart ache.

He uttered a single word with a sob that convulsed his whole frame, and my eyes filled with tears.

"Quetzalcoatl!" he exclaimed.

The next instant he had taken the bag of pearls from my unresisting hand, and with a last glance of reproach that cut my heart as with an envenomed and serrated blade, he, too, was gone into the yawning jaws below.

I stepped forward once — twice — and looked down from the very edge.

Then I turned and ran, holding my hand over my ears to drown the clamor and bellowings in the water—lest I, too, follow to those that waited- -red-eyed and hungry below, and as I ran I sobbed over and over again: Quetzalcoatl — Quetzalcoatl!"

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A First Fan Letter

THE EDITOR:

This is the first time I have ever sent congratulations to a magazine, but FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES deserves it.

Your magazine fills a long-felt desire to reread a bunch of swell stories printed years ago.

Bring on all the serials you want and don't cut any of them down.

If you get the chance, would like to see a reprint of "Red Dust," by Murray Leinster.

G. ROOKE.

PERTH AMBOY, N. J.

F.F.M. Is First

If FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES keeps on in the present vein it will undoubtedly become the leader in the science-fiction field.

Both the stories and the illustrations are improving with each issue. The complete stories, I rate as follows:

"On the Brink of 2000"—A very good story. It was an excellent plot, but I didn't think Smith built it up quite as much as he could have. This story was superior to December's novelet but inferior to "The Moon Metal."

"Behind the Curtain"—Quite good; I appreciated the Poeish tinge.

"The Red Germ of Courage"—The best story in the issue, barring the two serials. More of this type, please. A few descriptions in it were hazy in my mind, however.

"Weird Travel Tales"—By all means continue this series.

"An Astral Gentlemen"—Seems to be slightly tinged with satire but that's why I like it.

The "V" Force—Excellent; everything seems to point towards a sequel.

Now for the illustrations: As a whole they were excellent.

Of course Finlay's illustration for "C of MP," III, is head and shoulders above the others. It embodies his dot-work superbly with his line-work.

Close behind Finlay are Paul's pictures for "The Radio Man."

I certainly hope that you may be able to give us those full-page illustrations very often.

I am glad to hear that you have purchased a new story by S. A. Coblentz. I put in my bid for one of Coblentz's oldies such as "The Blue Barbarians" or "The Sunken World."

I might mention that although I run the gamut of s-f mags every month, yours is the first and oftentimes the only magazine I read from cover to cover and send in my opinions about.

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As a suggestion for some more stories to print in the future — "Between Worlds," "Treasures of Tantalus," "Slaves of the Wire," by Smith; I still hope for the Skylarks—if you do procure them be sure and reprint Paul's original illustrations for them. I only saw one for his "Skylark of Space," but that is enough—it was perfect.

As to Mr. Marks' idea for a title SCIENCE-FICTION, it's already in use and your magazine isn't strictly s-f.

In closing I put in a plea for Finlay on the cover.

And hope you go twice a month before the next year is out.

SYLVESTER BROWN.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

It's a Possibility

There is just one question I want answered. And that is: "Are you just going to reprint stories that appeared in Munsey Magazines or are you going to reprint stores that appeared in other magazines?"

If you do reprint stories from other magazines, here are some of the authors I would like to see in this magazine, in order of preference: Robert E. Howard, H. G. Wells, H. P. Lovecraft, Jack Williamson and David H. Keller.

I hope you print this, to get other readers' opinions on this.

W. WALLACE LLEWELLYN.

SAN JOSE, CALIF.

Merritt, Please!

I am writing you in the hope that you will consider my request that you publish in the near future, in FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES, Abraham Merritt's: "The Snake Mother" and "The People of the Pit."

I still am of the opinion that Mr. Merritt is the greatest since Jules Verne.

Hoping that my request will be at least considered.

RUSSELL VANDER CLOCK.

PATERSON, N. J.

Wants Paul to Do Cover

Just a note of thanks for the swell fantasy magazine you're putting out. I've waited long for a magazine of this type, in which I could read all the famous fantasy classics, printed before my time.

In the January, 1940, issue, I enjoyed Farley's "Radio Man" very much, with Garret Smith's "On The Brink of 2000" a close second. The rest of the yarns were all excellent with the exception of "Behind the Curtain," which I did not like.

As for future reprints, I would suggest some of Burrough's work, even though most of his can be found in book form. Also I would not

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like to see reprinted yarns that appeared a 1930.

Your inside illustrations are very good. lay and Paul are the best fantasy illustra in the field today. Let the whole magazin illustrated by them in the future.

Your magazine format is good, and neat; trimmed edges help a lot.

Now for the cover, my only objectio like the arrangement of the cover O.K., would very much like to see Paul do a co illustration every month. With this impro ment, your mag will be tops.

JIMMY TAURAS

FLUSHING, N. Y.

Hurry "The Blind Spot!"

When I bought the first number of MOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES I had to drop a line, out of sheer shock—very pleasant sh Issue No. 2, I found even better than No. No. 3 better yet; while the January issue the last straw. And here I am banging a at the keys again.

That you are now using serials is very c mendable. According to your letters dep ment (by all means continue it!) there i striking unanimity of opinion regarding w novels should be reprinted. Without allow my own opinion to enter into it, I might your attention to the many loud calls for following: "The Metal Monster," the rest the "Radio" novels, "Darkness and Daw the "Palos of the Dog-Star Pack" trilo "The Rebel Soul," "Into the Infinite," "A a Million Years" and one or two others. Th of course, it is imperative that you publis add my vote to those of the others.

Please continue using your present staff artists exclusively. Paul and Finlay are ex lent artists, each with a very distinctive st and both with a marvelous imagination.

I'm eagerly awaiting the February numbe to re-read the above-mentioned stories and peruse for the first time the yarns I hav previously read. What I'm really on need and pins waiting for, though, is of cours "The Blind Spot." Hurry it up!

In closing, I'd like to say that I hone think FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES affo me more pure, undiluted pleasure than other magazine I take.

PAUL H. SPENCER

WEST HARTFORD, CONN.

Likes Short Articles

Thanks ever so much for getting Frank Paul as illustrator. To my mind he is ab the best there is when it comes to illustrati some weird scene on some remote planet.

I have only one criticism to make about magazine and that is a minor one. Wouldn't be a better idea to publish three serials wit

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new one starting the same month one was ending? Whatever you do will be all right with me, but won't you please give this idea some consideration?

What chance is there for an early publication date of the "Metal Monster" by Merritt and "The Conquest of Mars" by Serviss?

In the January issue you had a short article about a sunken city off the coast of Japan which was very interesting. Please let us have more of these articles. Also others dealing with various branches of science.

FRANK SOLTIS.

CHICAGO, ILL.

More About Merritt

Even as Merritt sometimes is at a loss for words, so, am I; words to describe the pleasure derived from reading a *real* classic such as "The Conquest of the Moon Pool."

Here is a story really worthy of being reprinted and reprinted! I have never read this story before so the joys are a hundredfold. During the past three years, I have read every science fiction magazine I could procure but F.F.M. is undoubtedly the superior.

All your stories in the first four issues have been wonderful and the illustrations (Finlay's in particular) can't be beat.

I had the good luck to obtain an old *Amazing Stories* of 1928 or 1929 ecently. This magazine contained a serial entitled "A Columbus of Space." It was very intriguing i. the first installment and my own request is to have you republish this story.

Here's wishing you good luck and many more issues as breathtaking as the first ones.

RICHARD P. GAYNOR.

NEWCOMERSTOWN, OHIO

Wants Occult Stories

I am a boy thirteen years old and I am a Science-Fiction Fan. I am greatly interested in psychic research. Therefore I enjoyed your three stories, "Fruit of the Forbidden Tree," "Almost Immortal," and "An Astral Gentleman." I would like more of the same kind. I also would like to have a quiz page in your magazine.

Lots of luck!

DARRYL ARMSTRONG.

LODI, CALIF.

Fantastic Fan Editor

I've just bought the January F.F.M. and what is still to me an astonishing fact is how long it has taken for such a long and much-wanted magazine to make its appearance. With Paul and Finlay, who by the way is also from Rochester, "The Kodak City," there is nothing lacking in the finest of all fantasy magazines.

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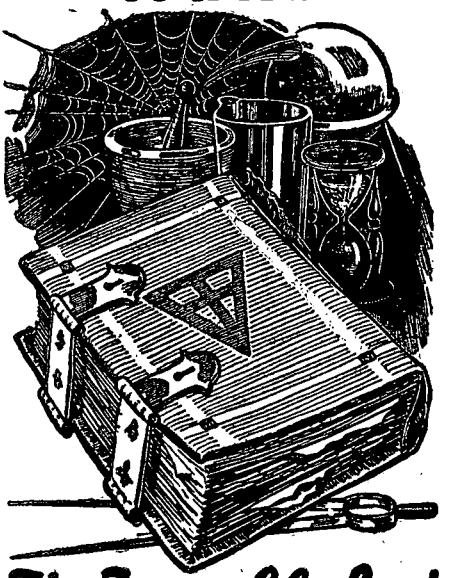

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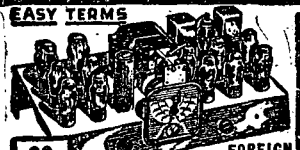

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29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
6.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75
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34x4½	3.45	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.65
33x5	3.75	1.75
35x5	3.95	1.75

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34x7	$10.95	$4.65
38x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	11.45	4.95
40x8	13.25	4.95

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Some stories I hope to see soon in F.F.M.: "Finis," by Frank Lillie Pollock; "In Saturn's Rings," by J. Aubrey Tyson; "The Gravity Regulator," by Emmett C. Hall; "Nemesis of the Vibratory Theory," by William Warren; "The Great Sleep Tanks," by Margaret P. Montague; "The Man Who Found Out," by Algernon Blackwood.

LARRY B. FARSACI,
Editor *Golden Atom.*

ROCHESTER, N. Y.

Satisfied Reader

I can easily understand how the editor responsible for the second issue of F. F. M. would be somewhat reluctant to sign his name in an open spot in the magazine. There would be danger of being mobbed by delighted fantasy readers and torn apart in the grateful excitement that would ensue.

Why? The requests in *The Readers' Viewpoint* were recognized without one "slide-out" trick to save the editor's neck. They asked for the sequel to "The Moon Pool" (which disappointed me because of its brevity *until* I saw the beginning of a six-part serial in the next issue—oh, joy supreme!), "The Lord of Death," smooth edges, "The Blind Spot" to come (I can't wait), Finlay illustrations, "Almost Immortal," monthly publication among many other requests. I don't think you realize the revolutionary tactics you are employing to satisfy your devouring readers. I dare you to name *one* mag that has answered the pleas of its readers in so short a space of time. I can only think of two more requests that a fan could possibly make. First: a title that would take less space and that would be more appropriate to the contents of your most magnificent magazine. I suggest "FAMOUS FANTASY." I don't like "fantastic" in the title of a magazine. Second: why do you omit a cover illustration? These wonderful tales most certainly deserve a cover.

I was rather disappointed in the first issue, but the second—WOW. "Almost Immortal" is best—the most magnificent of its kind I ever read. "The Moon Metal" was marvelous, too.

"Fruit of the Forbidden Tree" was kind of deep for me, but it was very beautiful.

Can you possibly print all of Merritt's stories? I do hope so. And I want to see all of the other tales mentioned by your readers.

The illustrations were very good in the November issue. Kindly have the artists sign their work, won't you? Finlay is collostounding.

Please stick to the weird tale and not the science-fiction story that is so prevalent today. You have done fine so far. Keep it up.

No need to wish you luck or success—you have it already.

CHARLES HIDLEY.

NEW YORK CITY.

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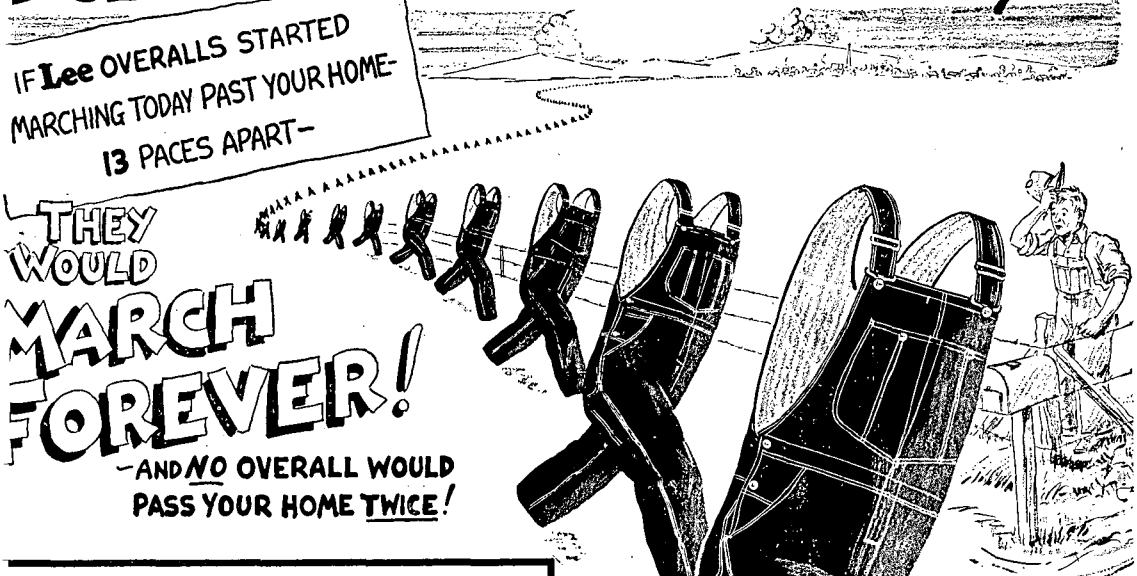

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